

SINGOALLA



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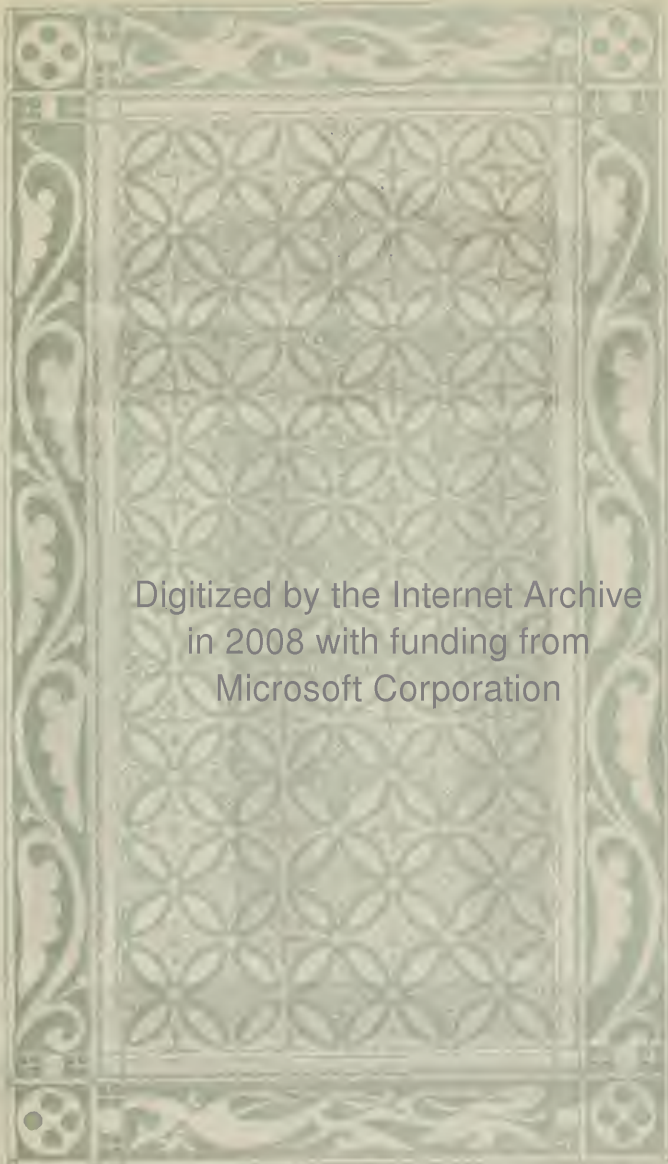
SINGOALLA



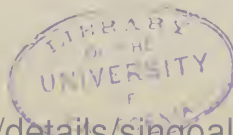
VIKTOR RYDBERG

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The Poisoned Draught.

SINGOALLA

A Mediæval Legend

BY

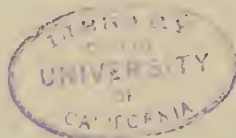
VIKTOR RYDBERG

Translated from the Swedish

by

JOSEF FREDBÄRJ

WITH 25 FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS



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PUBLISHERS' NOTE.

IN issuing the present book, *Singoalla*, it may not be deemed inappropriate to present the reader with a brief sketch of the literature of the country to which it belongs, together with a few lines respecting the life, and place in literature of its accomplished, versatile author.

The literature of a country and people claiming ancestors as far back as the Stone Age, or some 1500 years B.C., cannot fail to have a commanding, permanent charm for every student of literature. All of that little which has so far reached us, has been read with avidity, and enjoyed, not less for its philosophic charm and romanticism, than for its fantastic turn and powerful colouring. The translations from the Swedish that have appeared in this country can hardly be called numerous, the Swedish tongue being one that has hitherto appealed feebly to the English linguist, and *vice versâ*. Consequently, we are on the whole less familiar with the history and growth of Swedish literature, new or old, than we are, say, with the French, Italian, German, or even Russian.

It was the great work of Luther which gave life to Swedish literature. The Reformation infused the literature of Sweden as markedly as it altered the religious conditions of England. Two literary pioneers—Olaus and Laurentius Petrie—gave their country a Bible in good Swedish, and from that moment the growth of letters in Sweden went on apace. At first the principal books had theological or historical topics as their subjects; but by the time of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) a much more varied character marked the literature of the country. Political pamphlets, essays, newspapers, with works on mythology, the drama, philology, etc., began to appear.

Publishers' Note

The "Father of Swedish Literature" was Stjernhjehn [1598-1672], who set the fashion of classic-humorous poetry. In Triewald [*circa* 1680-1743] we meet Sweden's first satirist—one who was as bitter upon the older writers as Dalin [1708-63] was elegant and polished in his employment of his mother tongue. Then came a notable succession of brilliant writers of poetry and prose, among whom two at least stand out. One was the poetess Hedvig Nordenflycht [1718-63], the writer of *In Memoriam* lyrics collected under the title of the *Sorrowing Turtle-Dove*; the other was Mörk [*circa* 1700-63], a prose-man. During the eighteenth century Swedish writers devoted much attention to the treatment of science. The two Rudbecks left famous books; in addition to which came the learned writings of Linnæus, the great botanist; Rosen, the founder of Swedish medicine; Swedenborg, the philosopher-theologian; and others. The golden age of Swedish literature occupied the reigns of Gustavus III. and IV.—between the years 1771-1809. Prominent figures of the period are Bellman (*Freedman's Epistles*), Kellgren (*The New Creation*), Thorild, Rosenstein, Alderbeth, Lidner the poet, and the philosopher-author Höijer.

The opening of the nineteenth century found Hammarsköld [1785-1827] at the head of a band of writers with views and ideas which they were determined to force. They leaned to the romantic as against the academic in literature, and although their doctrines and principles met at first with much ridicule from the stolid academicians, the romanticists prevailed sufficiently to effect their purpose. They secured a *succès d'estime* of such worth that there sprang up in Sweden a school something akin to the German romantic school. In course of time this romantic movement was dethroned, if not extinguished. There was a sudden rush to the ancient Scandinavian mythology. Geijer [1783-1847], one of the most versatile of Swedish historical writers, and Tegner [1782-1846], whose poetic genius has left an ineffaceable mark upon the literature of Sweden—these two writers,

Publishers' Note

particularly, and a band of literary associates stationed themselves midway between the pseudo-classic and romantic schools, while they pointed to the manly virtues of the Swedes' ancestors as models for imitation and sources of poetic inspiration. Here was the "Gothic revival."

The story of Swedish literature during the nineteenth century would be a long one if even meagre justice were done to the long list of writers and their books. Runeberg [1804-77], the greatest poet who has written in Swedish, and the national poet of Finland, was the surpassing light of the century. He was of almost highest poetic genius, and overshadowed all his contemporaries. Otherwise Snoilsky, Rydberg, Topelius, and others might have been more heard of outside their own country. Yet poetry claimed not all attention during the past ten decades in Sweden. The nineteenth century more than atoned for the paucity of novelists in its predecessors. Many female novelists—notably Frederika Brema—adorned the era; while of the opposite sex there were Mellin, Sparre, Wetterberg, and several more, including the author of this book—Rydberg.

Viktor Rydberg, who became a really notable Swedish man of letters, was born at Jönköping, a town on Lake Wetter in Sweden, on the 18th of December 1828. As a child he evinced a great love for reading, especially of literature of a romantic and weird type, and this colouring has very largely permeated all Rydberg's writings. When twenty-three years of age he qualified as a student at the University of Lund, and a few years later decided to take up journalism and letters as a profession.

It was not long ere his remarkable literary talent asserted itself—and what was more, attracted the notice of European *littérateurs*. Several minor pieces betraying his exceptional gifts soon found their way among the current literature of his country, but it was not until the "'fifties" (1850-60) that Rydberg really gave true evidence of himself. In this decade appeared a book destined to be his first great

Publishers' Note

work. This was entitled *The Last Athenian* ("Den Siste Atenaren").

Singoalla, of which an English version is now for the first time placed before the public, was the next important work to follow *The Last Athenian*. This was succeeded by a work of partly religious, partly philosophic character, entitled *The Dogma of the Bible Concerning Christ*. In 1877 his *Roman Days* appeared, and was subsequently translated into English and published by Messrs. Putnam's Sons. Then followed another important work—a species of counterpart to *The Last Athenian*. This novel was entitled *The Armourer*. It is a splendid word-picture, and depicts in glowing colour the stirring episodes of the Reformation and the controversies which led up to and were consequent upon Luther's daring battle for Religion.

It was in the year 1876 that the University of Upsala conferred upon Rydberg the degree of an Honorary Doctor of Philosophy. In the same year he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Swedish Academy, an institution consisting of eighteen members only. A few years later—in 1884—Rydberg was appointed Professor of Social History in the University of Stockholm; later on he succeeded to the professorial chair of Art in the same institution. Yet greater honour awaited him. In 1887 he was made an honorary member of the Academy of Arts. All this while Rydberg was a ceaseless worker. His professorial studies and duties in no way stemmed the untiring energy of his pen, which retained all its vigour down almost to the hour when the quill was laid down and he ceased to write for ever. Rydberg, a literary luminary of no small magnitude, passed away, to the great grief of his countrymen, on the 20th September 1895, aged sixty-seven years. Shortly after his death his Lectures on Philosophy and the History of Art were published.

Rydberg is a poet as well as a writer of prose; indeed, in his compositions he is a lyrist, or, to use an obsolete title a lyric by preference. He shines out in his poetry almost as splendidly as in his more straightforward compositions.

Publishers' Note

His great gifts of feeling and imagination have led him to the expression of creations in verse possessing all the qualities of true poetry. The power of rendering in melodious words the thoughts which are the creations of feeling and imagination is not a far-removed accomplishment and possibility for the average person; but the true art of metrical composition,—the capacity to say great things in verse, and that verse of a character that will move the soul—this portion is denied to most of us. Rydberg in all his poems has given ample proof of its possession. It may be wondered why his work is practically unknown in this country. Certainly not for any lack of character, of beauty, or of many-sided sentiment and expression. Poetry is not as translatable as prose, and the translator from one tongue to another is hampered at every turn—and these usual difficulties are not lightened in the case of the Swedish language. When all is overcome, however, Rydberg will be found a delightful minor poet to whom to turn.

As a translator Rydberg has accomplished much excellent work, notably his version into Swedish of Goethe's *Faust*. On an extensive scale, too, are his lesser writings. These take the form of treatises on mythology—notably his *Researches in Teutonic Mythology*, history, philology, etc.; besides which there are a large number of essays and fugitive articles too numerous to mention.

It would be misleading to advance for Rydberg the right to a place in the foremost rank of modern men of letters; but that he claims our great attention for his services to nineteenth century literature is beyond doubt. There are some master minds—especially in literature—who dazzle by the splendour of their genius; others whose extraordinary, if not superlative intellectual gifts, shine with a gentler but often more sustained light. The latter is not infrequently the more glorious, the most appreciated light, because it is so maintained and sustaining. Amid lesser lights, a uniformly illuminative star will command the attention more surely

Publishers' Note

than a fitful burst of infinitely greater brilliancy. To such a constellation Viktor Rydberg may be said to belong. Though highly esteemed and admired by the educated section of his countrymen, who mourned him deeply at his death—

(“ One has only to die to be great ”)—

Rydberg during his lifetime was little known outside his own country. It is not improbable, however, that Rydberg's posthumous fame will be greater than that of his lifetime. Wherever his writings are translated to-day they are eagerly sought for and studied. This may be instanced of *Singoalla*. This legend-story appeared in book form the first time in 1865, and speedily ran into several editions. Subsequently it was translated into the Danish, German, Dutch, Finnish, French, Spanish, and Italian languages, until now it is presented to English readers in their mother tongue. It is safe to predict a fair future for Rydberg. As his works become known by means of translations, the lustre of his genius will illumine a wider range, and his literary influence must become steadily more apparent and determined.

The Last Athenian was the work which called forth the immediate approval of Rydberg's countrymen, besides attracting attention throughout Europe and America. It was translated into English by William Widgery Thomas, this edition being published at Philadelphia, U.S.A., in 1869. In *The Last Athenian*, the author takes us back to the dawn of Christianity. He shows us something of the inevitable struggle between heathenism and early Christianity; and if he does not sufficiently gauge the depths of pollution from which Christ and the Cross rescued the world, he yet throws much original thought on, probably, the most momentous epoch in the world's history. With that *verve* and picturesqueness so characteristic of the northern artistic temperament, Rydberg introduces picture after picture of most affecting character, delineating the antipathies and antagonism of the ancient mind and that of the Christian

Publishers' Note

upon that all-absorbing theme—the life of the day and that of the world to come. Briefly, the author vindicates a broad acceptance of Christianity, as opposed to fanatical orthodoxy and religious compulsion.

As the title-page shows, *Singoalla* is a mediæval Swedish saga. Without wishing to charm the reader in its favour, we may safely distinguish it as one of the most romantic and picturesque compositions which we know of in Scandinavian literature. Rydberg, we see, is still the mediævalist—still in his favourite Middle Ages. It would be a doubtful kindness to the reader to anticipate his legitimate privilege of exploiting the story and enjoying it for himself. We will say nothing of the story itself beyond to state that *Singoalla*—this is the name of the heroine—is a novel occupying quite a pre-eminent place among Rydberg's prose writings. We know that its author has left a great mark upon the literature of Scandinavian mythology. In *Singoalla*, his romanticism is still strikingly in the foreground, and strangely tintured with that fantastic, pantheistical philosophy which was so much a part and parcel of Rydberg. The period of the book is the Middle Ages—that slowly awakening epoch when Europe tardily revived from the black night of Roman madness to the faint dawn of Western sweetness and light; and all the peculiar mysticism and picturesqueness distinguishing that time pervade the book. Against such a background the splendid *dramatis personæ* of the story stand out in wondrously real fashion and with vivid effect. It is, indeed, the strong contrast nature of the story which lends it so much charm. There is so much darkness and so much light. Yet, the *chiaroscuro* in the picture is deftly disposed, and we get a balance of light in shadow and shadow in light as perfect as could be desired. Rydberg's *forte* is the distinctness and variety of his characters and a power of clothing them in most attractive colours. *Singoalla* furnishes ample confirmation of this. In the foreground are his many living figures gorgeously treated standing out wonderfully against a background of

Publishers' Note

sombre hue—well in keeping with that heart-rending, dark-night despair which followed in the wake of the Great Plague, and culminated in the Black Death of the fourteenth century. *Singoalla* is an affecting picture of those times, told in language as charming as it is simple.

Throughout his poetry, as in his prose, Rydberg exhibits consistently a great depth of thought—reflective of a strong and noble mind. In his own country particularly Rydberg is held to be of great importance as a pioneer in the struggle for freedom of thought. He was ever bent upon an insistence of new principles in the several spheres of thought. A champion of Idealism, he never ceased to preach the crusade of the brightest and best in intellectual reasoning and deduction—a most glorious task bearing in mind the narrow-minded naturalism that marred the mind of his country a few decades back. He blew fresh breath into the fusty spiritual atmosphere of his day, and in a long struggle for truth and enlightenment he sowed seed which speedily germinated, and is—even so soon—already bearing rich fruit. The cause of the poor and weak, and the principle of right against might were as close to Rydberg's heart as life itself, as every student of his poetry will readily discover. It is to be regretted that Rydberg's poetical compositions are not translated into English. Unfortunately, as we have said, those who are bold enough to attempt the reproduction of foreign verse are constantly confronted with obstacles which present themselves in a much less degree in prose translation.

Rydberg was not a prolific writer, but he took a wide literary range. With a powerfully descriptive pen, he brought home to his readers social domestic pictures of ancient, mediæval, and modern times. He was not as was our Dickens—a chronicler of his own times, of things as he found them. Rydberg loved plunging into the cloudy vista of the past and rescuing the beautiful from oblivion. From subjects relating to the history of civilisation he passed on to those of the antique; but in either case his style with its

Publishers' Note

classical nobleness and purity was perfectly adapted. His learned works on Scandinavian mythology will constitute an undying monument of his industry and learned research ; and here many might well envy Rydberg for his splendid virility.

The superlative feature of Rydberg's labours is that his writings may be read by all—young and old. Latitudinarian as he was in breadth of thought and intellect, he was certainly a Christian—one who had far from lost his footing on the rock of Eternity. A pioneer in thought, Rydberg, with dauntless courage, prepared the way in his country for fresh ideas of thought and vision. These were of the new rationalistic order, and of course they met with opposition. Like all pioneers, he met the usual fate: he was misunderstood and decried—and that in some few instances fiercely. Rydberg, however, laboured on, unmoved and determined, his remarkable creative faculty showing no sign of wane until it stopped for ever. To all branches of literature he turned, and left an indelible mark upon each department with which he identified himself. Viktor Rydberg deserves, indeed, well of both his country and the entire literary world.

FREDK. J. CROWEST.

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CONTENTS.

Part the First.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE CASTLE IN THE FOREST	I
II. SINGOALLA	14
III. LONGING	20
IV. THE STRANGERS FROM THE LAND OF EGYPT	28
V. ERLAND AND SINGOALLA	35
VI. IN THE TWILIGHT BY THE FOREST BROOK.	45
VII. THE COMBAT	54
VIII. THE CAMP	57
IX. THE BREAKING-UP OF THE CAMP	61
X. THE NIGHT	89
XI. THE POISONED DRAUGHT	96

Part the Second.

I. BENONI	101
II. THE KNIGHT AND THE PILGRIM	124
III. THE CAVE	134

Contents

CHAP.	PAGE
IV. THE SECRET POWER	146
V. DAY AND NIGHT	159
VI. THE LAST NIGHT-WANDERING	175
VII. DAWN	194
VIII. THE PLAGUE	209
IX. THE HERMITS OF THE FOREST	223

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
THE POISONED DRAUGHT	<i>Frontispiece</i>
THE CASTLE IN THE FOREST	2
FATHER HENRY'S STORIES	10
SINGOALLA	14
FATHER HENRY BLESSING ERLAND	26
THE STRANGERS FROM THE LAND OF EGYPT	28
ERLAND AND SINGOALLA	38
IN THE TWILIGHT BY THE FOREST BROOK	50
THE COMBAT	56
THE CAMP	66
THE BREAKING-UP OF THE CAMP: ASSIM	72
ERLAND TIED TO THE TREE	78
THE NIGHT	94
BENONI	110
CONSECRATION OF BENONI'S PIOUS MISSION	124
THE CAVE	140
THE SECRET POWER	146

Contents

CHAP.	PAGE
IV. THE SECRET POWER	146
V. DAY AND NIGHT	159
VI. THE LAST NIGHT-WANDERING	175
VII. DAWN	194
VIII. THE PLAGUE	209
IX. THE HERMITS OF THE FOREST	223

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
THE POISONED DRAUGHT	<i>Frontispiece</i>
THE CASTLE IN THE FOREST	2
FATHER HENRY'S STORIES	10
SINGOALLA	14
FATHER HENRY BLESSING ERLAND	26
THE STRANGERS FROM THE LAND OF EGYPT	28
ERLAND AND SINGOALLA	38
IN THE TWILIGHT BY THE FOREST BROOK	50
THE COMBAT	56
THE CAMP	66
THE BREAKING-UP OF THE CAMP: ASSIM	72
ERLAND TIED TO THE TREE	78
THE NIGHT	94
BENONI	110
CONSECRATION OF BENONI'S PIOUS MISSION	124
THE CAVE	140
THE SECRET POWER	146

List of Illustrations

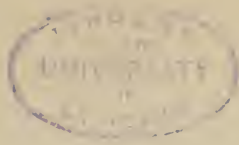
	PAGE
"THEY ONLY RESTED"	156
HE SEIZED HIS BOW	160
THE LAST NIGHT-WANDERING	176
DAWN	202
THE PLAGUE	208
THE KNIGHT AND THE MONK	216
BROTHER JOHN	224
AFTER A LONG EMBRACE	226



SINGOALLA.







SINGOALLA.

Part the First.

I.

THE CASTLE IN THE FOREST.

ON an islet in one of the lakes of Smoland there stood a castle which had for a time belonged to the family of Mone-sköld. It consisted of several oak-built houses joined together, and a round tower of large blocks of granite. The monotony of the tower-wall here and there was broken by a loop-hole with round arch and little sandstone pillars.

It looked as if each successive owner had brought materials to the islet, and added his portion to the whole, according to his liking and the needs of his time.

In the fourteenth century the castle was one entire building, with its lines broken by roofs of

Singoalla

different pitch and height, and with walls meeting at different angles. Though poor in windows, they were rich in projections, galleries, and symbolic works of wrought iron and carving. Above the well-carved posts of the gateway there stood statues of the three martyrs—Unaman, Sunaman, and Vinaman,—imposing perhaps, if not beautiful, that stretched their arms towards the sky as if to call down blessings upon the castle of Ekö.

The islet was surrounded by a stockade, and a drawbridge joined it to the land.

Time had painted the castle grey and brown, and it looked as if it held past and future in mystery. It seemed as if its silence lay upon it that nothing might disturb its brooding memories and presentiments.

Fir-clad grey stone steeps were mirrored in the lake, and the dark pine forest stretched far and wide every way. In one spot alone the shore sloped treeless towards the lake, where the rising gables of a monastery peeped out from between the birch trees of the valley.

Its foundations still exist. I have sat there on a late autumn day, the sky gloomy above



The Castle in the forest.



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The Castle in the Forest

me, while the damp breath of the wind rustled and sighed through the pale reeds of the shore, with dead and dying plants at my feet. Though a solitary gentian or pansy still preserved a belated, transient splendour, the hues of decay spread melancholy over the fields and forest. The mountain-ash that had sprung between the stones bore, on branches almost leafless, clusters of berries which glowed in the hazy daylight with drops saved from the blood of summer. What the name of the monastery was none but archæologists know; tradition has it that the "Black Death" laid it waste, and that since it has been left to decay.

About the year 1340, Riddar¹ Bengt Mone-sköld was lord of Ekö. There was a saying—even then old—"that the castle lay in silence"; and it was said of its successive owners, that a word cost them more than the bestowal of large charities. The Moneskölds seemed to go their way noiselessly like the moon,² which, according to one

¹ "Riddar," equivalent to the English "Knight," was at that period the highest title of nobility in Sweden.

² Monesköld in Swedish signifies "Moonshield."

Singoalla

tradition, was said to have been their heathen ancestor's friend, and given him a silver sickle. Among the numerous memorials and emblems of their ancestors which hung upon the walls of the castle, the sickle was, however, nowhere seen, except over the door leading to the garden, but here it lay under the Blessed Virgin's feet. Did anybody ask the good knight Bengt about this strange tradition, he made a deprecatory gesture, or the sign of the cross, and answered: "It was in heathen times." His faithful servant Erasmus, the huntsman, was more ready to give a clearer account of the matter.

The people of the neighbourhood knew why silence brooded over Ekö and the Ekö family. When the messengers of Christianity—those three whose images stood above the portal, and raised their eyes and hands towards the sky—came to Smoland, and from its barrows began to speak of the White Christ, and the Holy Father in Rome, he of the ancestors of the Moneskölds who was then living had vehemently striven against them, gathered the people to the hill-sanctuaries and the holy groves, and urged them to hold fast to impenetrable Odin,

The Castle in the Forest

white Balder, and mighty Thor! It is said, in honour of them he sang, to the harp, songs so mighty and enchanting, that the folk thought they heard the voices of all living things singing with him. So they hardened their hearts against the new faith, and drove away its messengers. That was why silence brooded over Ekö and the Ekö family. But silence was not now a thing of penance, as it is said once to have been, for seven pious generations had striven to lighten their consciences by atonement for the guilt of the heathen singer.

It was said that no Christian Monesköld could or would sing under the open sky—none, that is, before Erland, Riddar Bengt's son, who was still a boy. People often had heard with wonder his voice from out of the forest gloom, in which with bow and hunting-spear he loved to stroll, as he sang song after song, weird, wild, and beautiful when the fir-trees and spruces murmured their loudest. He went alone, save when he wished Erasmus the huntsman to accompany him.

Erasmus was a clever woodsman, skilled in the nature and ways of wild beasts, and mightily learned

Singoalla

in all that touched wood-sprites, gnomes, and elves. But Erland's most constant companions were two dogs, large and shaggy, with bloodshot eyes and keen fangs, Käck and Grip by name, hated by the neighbours, and eyed by the wolves with hungry and fierce dread.

From the highest ledge of rock overhanging the lake, Erland used to plunge into the water. Swimming he loved—especially when the wind stormed and the waves were white. People fancied there was something restless and wild about this boy—some lingering touch of heathen ancestry—something in him that had not known the sacred water of the font.

What if that heathen Monesköld, who had not suffered himself to be marked even with the sign of the cross, and who on his death-bed had raved of warrior-maidens and the mead of the undying—what if he had returned in Erland? That was the question which the peasants asked themselves in their homes. But the Ekö servants avowed that Erland crossed himself devoutly and said his prayers with clasped hands; that he was obedient to his father and mother, and showed his teacher, Father Henry, reverence; that he

The Castle in the Forest

was kind-hearted though quick-tempered, bountiful like all the Moneskölds, and anxious to be just, even if he was not always so. Erasmus the huntsman, who believed he knew Erland best, said "Yea" to all this, but with a shake of his head.

Bengt had not made life at Ekö more lively than his fathers, and his wife Elfrida, a woman of a comely build, slender and fair, who bore Christ's Sermon on the Mount in her glance and a gleam from Tabor on her forehead, did her many duties quietly and with authority.

Twice a year there was a banquet given at Ekö, to which came kinsmen and friends from distant estates and large farms. These feasts were splendid. Gold-embroidered tapestries covered the walls of the banqueting-hall, and costly plate the tables; the wine-cellar gave up its stores of rare drink. Merriment was not suppressed, though there was a certain constraint. The guests did not know why, but they felt somewhat subdued, even when they were led to bed mellow. Herr¹ Gudmund Ulf sax himself, the

¹ The title "Herr" was at that time the equivalent of the English "Squire," and was the original title of nobility in Sweden. Now "Herr" is merely equivalent to the English "Mr."

Singoalla

nearest neighbour, who shouted rather than spoke, and cursed more than he blessed when he had plenty of beer and wine under his doublet, was courteous at Ekö, moderate and ceremonious in word and bearing, and, when put to bed, babbled—with a respectable attempt at devotion learned in his childhood and now foreign to him—his Latin evening prayer, if indeed he did not put his morning prayer in its place.

Riddar Bengt was a seasoned warrior. He had fought under Mats Kettilmundsson for the cause of the unfortunate Dukes, and in Scania against the Lords of Holstein. Now, old and grey, he discharged, in a fatherly and prudent manner, his duties as master. The winter days he passed mostly in the workshop in company with Olof Hallstensson, the yeoman, who had carved the altar in the parish church. There the two, sparing of words, worked untiringly, and from their hands came carvings of angels, apostles, and saints: Maries and Catherines, Gabriel with a lily in his hand, St. Peter with keys, St. Paul with a sword, St. Sigfrid with a staff, St. George in armour, and St. Sebastian with arrows in his half-naked body. The real craftsman was Olof

The Castle in the Forest

Hallstenson, though the Knight did not do the rough work only; he carved the folds of the mantles skilfully and laid on the colours well. Many winters Bengt had passed thus. Of holy images he seemed never to have enough. The chapels of the castle and the monastery had been provided, and the banqueting-hall and the bedroom. Even in the long, dark corridors saints peeped out of nooks and corners, and dwelt on landings of the stairs, absorbed in solemn thoughts. In the part of the castle which was believed to date from heathen times, stood St. Sigfrid, and before him knelt the heathen who had set Balder before Christ, and Odin before the Holy Trinity. His image, as one might see, expressed repentance for this grievous sin, and prayed fervently that his kin who came after him might not be smitten by evil therefor. A harp—that of the magic heathen song—lay broken in pieces beside him. Many a time, when Bengt awoke in the night, he thought of this poor soul in Purgatory, but consoled himself with the reflection that masses for the dead and the good deeds of his kinsfolk mitigated its pain, and rendered salvation possible.

Singoalla

Father Henry, Erland's teacher, had travelled much before he settled down as Prior in a monastery deep in the forests of Smoland. His monks said that his reputation as a theologian was great in distant countries, and people knew that King Magnus had bowed as low to this prior as to the Archbishop of Upsala. Seldom did a year pass without travellers from afar bringing him letters written from Avignon by the Pope himself, or by the most learned men of the University of Paris. High dignities had been offered him, but he had in his monastery all he aspired to in the world: time for meditation and study, time to record on parchment his hopes of a coming kingdom of God on earth. He was fond of reading old Roman poems, though their authors were heathens, and Virgil's verse, "*Magnus ab integro seclorum nascitur ordo,*"¹ sounded to him with a prophetic ring. Books, too, written in strange characters, he read—books of which the other monks said, *Græca sunt, non leguntur*: they are Greek—we don't read them. Father Henry had spent a couple of years in the Greek

¹ "Mighty is the procession of ages that is coming to birth anew."

The Castle in the Forest

city of the Cæsars ; hence the Greek literature in his library.

A week seldom passed in which he did not spend one evening at least, settled comfortably in the roomiest arm-chair that the castle of Ekö afforded, with Lady Elfrida on one side and Bengt on the other. The Knight was sparing of words, but he often drank to the Father ; and the look which accompanied the toast expressed reverence, friendship, and comfort. Lady Elfrida asked questions—the monk answered her and told stories. And how much he had to tell ! He had seen the world that is, and knew, from books, the world that was. He used no superfluous words, but what word-pictures these stories of his were ! Lady Elfrida took care that Erland should be present at such times. And the boy liked to be there, and listened attentively. “Such deeds I shall live to see ; such, and many more,” thought he.

Sometimes, however, it happened that his attention wandered. If it were a moonlit evening, he could hardly pay attention to the Father’s words. He saw in his imagination the blood-red moon, rising over the forest ; he saw her floating like a silver

Singoalla

boat in the cool blue heaven; he saw her peeping in through the bedroom window—he saw her even drop a glittering silver sickle through the heavens to his heathen forefather; he saw the girl Bil happy with the boy Hjuke in the silvery boat which carried them away; he saw moonbeams shimmering in the folds of Lady Elfrida's dress. Such were the pictures which chased each other through his mind. Was Erland at all akin to the moon?

Nor was it easier for him to follow the Father's words when the waves of the lake were booming around the island, and the wind was howling in the pine forest. He heard voices which called him forth, and had dim, hidden truths to tell him. Then it came to pass that his imagination shaped forth a harp large as the world, adorned with flashing stars strung across the endless blue of heaven—its strings vibrating under sun-woven fingers, or touched by gloomy masses of clouds, chased by the storm and by blue-white lightning flashes. And from this mighty harp his thoughts flew back to that broken heathen harp at St. Sigfrid's feet. Why, he did not know—he did not even think about it.

The Castle in the Forest

At the opening of this story Erland was seventeen years old, strong and handsome, skilled in many sports, and well-read, often gay, but brooding at times, quick to wrath, and quick to make atonement for his hastiness ; a youth in some things, a child in others.

Herr Gudmund Ulfsax was a widower, and had a blue-eyed daughter named Helen. Bengt and Gudmund thought that the young people were destined for each other. Both were only children, and the estates were so situate that to join them seemed only right and easy. Lady Elfrida was of the same opinion, and the fathers agreed that Erland and Helen, in a few years, should become husband and wife. As yet the children were shy in each other's presence ; but love, like all else, has its hour.

II.

SINGOALLA.

ONE summer's day Erland was returning from the chase.

One of the hills in the forest was surmounted by a young fir-tree, slender in girth, but in height overtopping all the rest. It was visible from the castle windows, towering over the surrounding forest, and when it stood out against a red evening sky, it was as if it looked out longingly into the world, and wished to be far away in a land of palms.

Below the hill a brook purled over sand and pebbles on its way to the lake. Farther on in the forest the brook took its way, checked by moss-grown stones and tree-roots, hundreds of years old; but here its banks widened into grassy sward, where blue, white, and red flowers grew in beauty. Here Erland often sat, enjoying the rustling of the firs and the solitude, and here now he directed his steps

Singoalla

to drink of the fresh water of the brook. The two hounds, Käck and Grip, accompanied him.

When he reached the top of the hill, he stopped astonished, for he beheld a strange sight. A girl was sitting by the brook. He did not see her face, for she did not look towards him, but he saw her black hair flowing over her bare shoulders, and a dark dress trimmed with many-coloured ribbons. The girl dipped her naked feet into the brook, seemingly enjoying the coolness of the water, and perhaps amused by the bubbles which her feet made. She began to sing in a clear, melodious voice, which rang through the wood.

Who was she? She certainly did not belong to the country-side, as was clear from her bearing, dress, and her songs, which sounded so unlike the ditties of the girls of the neighbourhood, when they were looking for their strayed cattle. Who was she, then? A fairy or an enchanted princess? Silent and wondering, Erland stood on the hill, and felt in his heart something secret, inexplicable, eerie, and yet alluring!

But Käck and Grip fixed fierce eyes on the girl, growling angrily. And while Erland stood

Singoalla

watching her, absorbed in thought, Grip rushed down the hill as if he meant to tear her in pieces.

Then Erland, seeing her danger, called the dog back. But before he called, the girl turned quickly and rose, and just as the dog was driving his teeth into her dress, she thrust a dagger into his neck. Grip fell at her feet with a piece of the dress between his teeth.

Erland's eyes flashed with anger as he saw the death of his faithful dog, and walking forward with quick steps he shouted, "Who are you who have dared to do this?"

But the girl looked with large, black, sparkling eyes at the fair, well-born lad; her brown cheeks turned to a deep crimson, her lips quivered, and she brandished the dagger, dripping with blood, till the red pearl bracelets round her naked arms rattled.

"Perhaps you will kill *me* now?" she cried passionately with a foreign accent. And she lifted the dagger in defence against the other dog, which was about to rush at her.

Erland ordered Käck to lie down, and as the dog did not at once obey his master's voice, he

Singoalla

gave him a blow with his bow, and he slunk back howling.

The eyes of the girl and youth met defiantly; but somehow the girl smiled.

"I am not afraid of you," she said, and so threw the dagger that it whizzed through the air, and lodged with the point in a tree.

Erland's anger changed to wonder and curiosity.

"You are a strange girl," he said; "but shame to me if I cannot meet a girl in a man's game."

He unsheathed his hunting-knife and threw it at the same tree. The knife struck into the tree beside the dagger, but so deeply that half of the blade was hidden in the bark. He went up to the tree, tore out both knives, washed hers in the brook, and returned it to her.

"You are a pretty girl," he said, "but a very strange one. . . . Would you," he asked moodily, "like me to kill the other dog too?"

"No," answered the girl, as she replaced the dagger in the sheath she carried in a belt; "the dog is guiltless. He and his like do as their masters wish. But you must be cruel and wicked."

And she called Käck, who, at a sign from his

Singoalla

master, approached her creeping. The girl caressed his rough head.

“Forgive me,” said Erland; “you are right. I am cruel and wicked, but do not think that I set the dog on you. I did not mean any harm to you.”

“I believe you.” She looked with a keener glance into Erland’s face. “Do you live in this neighbourhood?”

“Yes.”

“Farewell,” said the girl. “We shall not meet again.” She was just about to hurry into the forest when Erland, as if awaking from a dream, lifted his head and exclaimed,

“No, no; stay!” in such a voice that the strange girl turned round.

“Tell me what your name is,” said he, seizing her hand.

“You ask too much.”

“No, I care not for your name, if you only tell me whence you come, and why we shall never more see each other.”

“My name is Singoalla, I come from afar, and stay not in any place.”

Singoalla

“And we shall never meet again?”

“What do you care about me? To-morrow you will have forgotten me.”

“No, I shall never forget you.”

Instead of answering, Singoalla bent down, picked up a red flower, threw it into the brook, and ran into the forest.

Erland stood alone. His eyes followed the girl as she disappeared. Thus he stood for a while, silent, motionless, dreaming. At last he was aroused by Käck's howling. The dog looked at his master uneasily, for he did not know him in that mood. Erland threw his bow over his shoulder and went slowly up the hill.

III.

LONGING.

THE following day Erland returned to the hill by the brook. He carried his bow in his hand, and Käck accompanied him, but he was not thinking of hunting. He thought of Singoalla, the brown girl. He had dreamed of Singoalla in the night—dreamed that she seized his hand and pressed it, that he pressed hers in return, that they looked intently into each other's eyes, and in a strange way felt happy. Such a dream Erland had never had before ; most of his dreams were of fights with the shaggy things of the forest, of tournaments, and Saracen turbans cleft in twain.

He came to the brook, but Singoalla was not there. Perhaps she will come, thought he, and he sat down on the grass where the girl had sat before, and listened long to the murmur of the brook. But Singoalla did not come. Then it was as if the brook

Longing

had whispered to him: "Seek in the forest, whence I come." Erland arose and followed the brook into the forest. He wandered in the shade of the spruce trees, climbed over boulders and crags, and came to a place cleared by the wood-cutter's axe, but with no house on it. Only a hut of twigs, such as charcoal-burners build, stood there beside the remains of a charcoal-kiln: heather, toadstools, and ferns grew all round it. Stakes had been fixed in the ground. While he was wondering what they had been used for, Erasmus the huntsman came wandering up the glade, and told him that a strange people, men, women, and children, with brown complexion and black hair and eyes, curiously attired and talking an outlandish speech, with horses, waggons, and much baggage, had pitched their tents on the clearing, stayed there for one day, and then wandered northwards. Erasmus had no more to tell, but he showed the ruts of their waggons winding along where the trees stood apart. And as Erland looked at the ruts and thought that Singoalla must be of these people, he found on the ground a red pearl, like those about the girl's arms and ankles. That pearl he picked up and hid near his heart, which

Singoalla

whispered, "She has gone: you will never see her again." Erasmus, who saw that Erland brooded, said, "I saw just now a man bring the collar of Grip to Ekö. Grip lies in the forest, eaten by wolves. Are you sad for the loss of your good hound?"

It was as Erasmus had said. The wolves had found during the night the body of Grip near the brook, had dragged it far from there into the forest, and eaten with delight the flesh of their old enemy.

Erland answered Erasmus that there were many good hounds, but few so good as Grip. He said farewell to Erasmus, who wandered away, and he himself went back to the castle.

Daily he returned to the hill by the brook. Did he think that Singoalla would come back? Summer, however, passed away; the autumn came; red, blue, and white flowers by the brook faded like Erland's wild temper; the oaks, which stood among the spruce trees, turned yellow and strewed their acorns on the earth; the days grew shorter and the sky more cloudy; the birds of passage had left for the south; the rain fell in showers; the

Longing

brook overflowed the spot where Singoalla once sat. Erland had sat there often, too.

But even when the hill was covered with snow, Erland, accompanied by Käck, came to the brook; yet not so often as before. He did not hope to find Singoalla, but he loved the place, and he sang and listened to the echo, for "Singoalla" was his song.

Bengt marvelled at the change in his son, and often asked if all the wolves and foxes were dead, and all the birds gone to other lands, for Erland's hunting was now always fruitless. "My herdsmen, however," he would add, "say otherwise, for they often bring me news that rough-coated thieves have thinned out my herds." To all this Erland answered little. But Lady Elfrida rejoiced at her son's demeanour, which was now gentler than before. Yet sometimes she fancied he was unhappy, and asked him if anything troubled him. But Erland answered "No," and gazed through the banqueting-hall window towards the tall fir on the hill.

During the winter Father Henry found Erland a more diligent pupil. Every day he went to the monastery. The janitor, Brother John, who knew

Singoalla

his way of ringing, put his tonsured head through the spying-hatch in the gate, saluted him, and opened to him. Through a vaulted passage between the cells of the monks Erland passed to the library, where the Prior generally sat. It was a room with vaulted roof and lofty arched windows set with small leaded panes, so sun-burnt that the birches standing outside, waving in the wind, looked like green shadows. The walls were covered with book-cases ornamented with carving. The books, bound in calf, stood with chain and lock attached to the wall. Of these locks the Prior kept the key, to guard these priceless works against thievish hands, and to prevent the monks taking down books and reading them without his knowledge. "For," said he, "many of these works were written by heathen Romans, and are dangerous for unskilled minds."

The pupil advanced day by day in favour with his master. It happened one winter's evening, when Erland was sitting at his side in the library, that the Prior shut the volume of patristic theology which he had been reading, and with a meaning look went to the bookcase, loosed another book from its chain and put it before his pupil.

Longing

“He is no longer a child,” said the Prior to himself; “his understanding is ripening perceptibly; I need not fear to let him read this book under my guidance. It is dangerous; but the danger is such as awaits his age, and can be lessened by an old friend.”

It was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The Prior carefully chose the pieces he thought suitable. So they read of the love of Hero and Leander, and Erland gave to Hero the features of Singoalla. They read of the love of Pyramus and Thisbe, and Erland gave to Thisbe Singoalla's eyes, colour, and red lips.

He read of the tragical end of their love—no, of their fate—and the tale brought the tears to his eyes.

Like Lady Elfrida, Father Henry rejoiced at the change in him. Often he sat with the boy's hands in his, and told him something drawn from the rich experience of his life. Thought often clouded his forehead, and his eyes were fixed searchingly on Erland. It was as if he wished to tell him something, but hesitated to do so. Great thoughts stirred the Father's soul, but he doubted

Singoalla

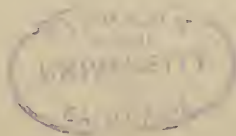
if Erland's mind was fit soil for the seed he wished to sow.

One winter's evening, however, near spring, it happened that, after master and pupil had studied together, the old man put his hands on the youth's shoulders, and his eyes gleamed. In a half whisper, which sounded solemn and mysterious in the faintly-lighted vault, he spoke of the dominion of the soul over the body, of the power of the invisible word over strength of body and pride of mind, over princes and mighty men, over the armies of the world, though they were as innumerable as the sands of the sea. A mighty edifice is being built with its foundation on earth, and its top in heaven, said he, and when it is finished, the earth will no longer be earth, but a heaven below, a mirror of the heaven above. The foundation is laid, the pillars are being raised, some already tower to the sky; but evil giants, who have a foreboding that this edifice will become a prison where they will be bound with unbreakable chains for all eternity, have seized hold of the pillars to overthrow them. But still the work shall be made ready, for the power of good is greater than that

Longing


of evil, inasmuch as God is greater than the devil. But in this life God lives only in pure human hearts, and every heart which opens to Him strengthens His power in this life. "Will you," said the old man, "become God's ally? Will you carry your stone to this edifice? It is not easy, for it requires more than man's strength, more than man's courage. It demands the renunciation of all earthly things. Have you strength enough to sacrifice the rose of life to God, and keep the thorns of life only for yourself? More I cannot say now!"

So spoke Father Henry, and Erland, who maybe did not quite understand his words, but felt them in his heart, said he wished to be God's helper, and expressed his willingness to be God's ally. So the old man put his hand on Erland's head and blessed him.



IV.

THE STRANGERS FROM THE LAND OF EGYPT.

PRING has come : the ice-floes which drifted on the lake have melted before the rays of the sun, the trees are budding, and the forest is exhaling fragrance!

Do you see, Erland, the flocks of birds which soar high in the air? They are returning from the south. Do you feel the fresh breaths of air that sport through the windows of the great hall? They are bringing greetings from distant countries! Will not she too return, she whose memory winter has not wrapped in the snow of oblivion? Hark! From the forest sound the voices of men, the tramp of horses, the creak of waggons, and the cracking of whips. It is as if a great procession were approaching. From out the forest there comes a motley crowd: men in long cloaks; women in many-coloured raiment; half-naked children clamouring, laughing, and crying; horses,

The Strangers from the Land of Egypt

waggon, dogs! They approach the castle. All hurry to the windows; the servants, at work in the court, pause and look with astonishment at the new-comers; the warder looks hesitatingly at the Knight, who beckons to him to let down the drawbridge. The strangers pass over it, but leave their horses and waggon on the other side. They group themselves in a semicircle. The men draw forth from their cloaks pipes and stringed instruments; the young girls, black-eyed and raven-haired, with pearls round their bare arms, their dark or red gowns bedizened with tinsel and gay ribbons, step forth from the crowd of women. The pipes and the stringed instruments sound, and the girls dance strange dances. Nimble like the sparks over a crackling flame, light like the wind on green fields, they whirl round one another to shrill music, till it stops and the girls hurry back to where the older women are gathered. Then Father Henry appears on the drawbridge; he comes from the monastery where the strangers had been a short while ago, and one of them, a tall man, more richly clad than the others, goes to meet him, and makes a low obeisance. The

Singoalla

Father beckons him to follow. They approach the steps of the castle, where Bengt had descended in order to learn who the strangers were and what they wanted.

The tall man bows humbly to the lord of Ekö, and puts both his hands on his forehead. His long hair is black, blue-black the crisp beard around his lips; dark, proud, and yet shy is the glance he fixes on the Knight.

He is silent, but Father Henry speaks for him :

“These people ask for your favour, noble sir, and for leave to pitch their tents in your forest, for they intend to stay here a few days and then resume their wandering. For, you must know, noble sir, that these men belong to a people to whom God denies peace and quiet, and dooms to wander, generation after generation, from country to country. Marvellous is their fate and a thing to ponder, for it bears witness of God's almightiness and stern righteousness, and of the everlasting verity of our holy religion.

“The ancestors of this wandering people lived, as this man—a chief among them—has told me,

The Strangers from the Land of Egypt

more than one thousand three hundred and forty years ago in the land of Egypt. They were a tribe of note of the lineage of Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar, and dwelled settled in a fruitful country not yielding to Goshen in fertility.

“One day there came to their dwellings a wanderer, accompanied by a woman with a young babe in her arms. For himself and his family the wanderer asked for shelter from the night and from the storm. Each in turn refused, referring him one to the other. But the strangers whom they turned away from their thresholds were St. Joseph, Mary the Queen of Heaven, and the Saviour of the world. And in punishment for this sin God doomed them and their children to wander homeless for two thousand years without other hope for their lives than the pity of strangers. More than half of their toilsome journey is now accomplished, but still twenty-three generations, reckoning three to a century, will die on the journey before they reach the goal for which they long: their own country and reconciliation with God. Noble sir, these people, who crave your hospitality for a few days, have passed through

Singoalla

many countries, and have, not without success, entreated many princes for the same favour. They ought to be regarded as penitent pilgrims ; derided, despised, expelled, and persecuted in many places—for the chalice of suffering is put into their hand—yet, nevertheless, they have been granted letters of safe-conduct from the Emperor, and have moreover had the privilege of appearing before our Holy Father in Rome. . . .”

At these words the chief took out of his coat-pocket a parchment tied round with many ribbons, unrolled and handed it with another bow to Bengt.

The Knight would have had some difficulty in reading the words which were written on the parchment, but from the large wax-seal bearing the arms of the Holy Roman Empire, that was attached to it, he understood that this was the safe-conduct of which the Father had spoken. The Knight reverently eyed the parchment, returned it to the chief, and, stopping the Father who was about to continue his speech, said :

“Most remarkable is that which I have now heard about you, and it seems to me that I should commit a sin, not unlike that for which you your-

The Strangers from the Land of Egypt

selves are bearing the punishment, if I refused to let you stay for a few days on my lands. Meat and drink you shall not lack during that time; and as for you, the chief, and your nearest kindred, I invite you to lodge beneath my roof."

The chief returned thanks in humble words, but declared that a vow, inherited from his forefathers, compelled him as well as his people never to seek a night's rest in a house, be it of stone or timber, till their time of punishment should expire. Furthermore, as a reason for his asking for a few days' hospitality, he informed the Knight that he had arranged to meet here a tribe of his people which had for some time been separated from him in order to visit other places, and was now about to rejoin him.

After other remarks had been exchanged between Bengt and the chief of the wandering people, the strange troop marched off to the field in the forest where they had once before pitched their tents, and here Bengt had meat and drink brought in abundance, so that for a whole week they might be well provided for.

But among the girls with black curly hair who

Singoalla

had danced in the court Erland had discovered Singoalla. It was she who led the dance, for she was the chief's daughter, and of all the girls the most beautiful.

The Father spent the evening in the castle in order to talk to Bengt about their strange guests, and communicate to him some other matters which he had gathered from the chief, when the latter had called on him in the monastery, and asked for his intercession with the Knight.

V.

ERLAND AND SINGOALLA.

ERLAND had at first listened to the Father's account, which struck him as marvellous, and which touched him nearly as concerning the people to whom Singoalla belonged. But restlessness drove him out of the hall, and he wandered from room to room in the castle, hurrying up the stairs to the topmost chamber of the tower, whence he looked out over the lake and forest and listened to the tinkling of the bells on the horses of the strange people. He ran down the stairs to the castle garden, which, well kept but small and surrounded by stone walls, lay on the south side of the castle, where the evening sun shone goldenly over Lady Elfrida's flowers and pot-herbs. Nor did he linger there, but hurried to the maidens' bower, whither he seldom went. Here Lady Elfrida kept in a well-waxed press her son's holiday clothes,

Singoalla

and here there was a mirror of polished steel on which the maidens were fond of looking. Erland opened the press, took out the garments of costly foreign stuff with elegant silver clasps, and arrayed himself. He combed his light brown hair till it fell in long wavy curls over his shoulders. None but he knew why he took all this trouble. When he had finished he flung his bow over his shoulder, called Käck, saddled his horse and rode away over the drawbridge into the forest. The glances of Lady Elfrida and her maidens followed him, for he looked comely on his good horse, with its fine trappings. But Lady Elfrida entered the hall and told the Knight that Erland had ridden away and could hardly be expected home before the morrow. Doubtless he had taken the road to Ulfosa, the estate of Gudmund Ulf sax, or why should he have so dressed himself if not for Helen, his destined bride ?

But of Helen Ulf sax Erland was not thinking at all, though a girl of fairer face and clearer blue eyes there was not in all Virdaland. The face which Erland only remembered was brown; the eyes whose light warmed his soul were dark,

Erland and Singoalla

and the name of the girl was not Helen but Singoalla.

Lady Elfrida's guessing came to nought, for soon after sunset Erland was seen riding back again over the drawbridge. He had been strolling in the forest near the clearing, and had watched from between the trees the strange people busied in pitching their tents, feeding their horses, and cooking their food. He had seen and heard the children's noisy play round the fires. But he had not ridden there. The thought of Singoalla had lured him, but now he felt shy of seeing her. So, after much hesitation and with purpose unfulfilled, he turned homewards. But no such doubt withheld Käck, and he ran into the camp, perhaps in the hope of meeting his kind among the strange folk, or drawn by the smell of the cooking-fires. When Erland sprang from the saddle in the castle-yard, Käck came out of the forest and jumped up to his master as if he had brought a greeting to him. Perhaps he had, for around his shaggy neck hung a wreath of wild flowers. Erland saw it, and his thoughts lit up his eyes. "Could Singoalla have sent it?" He loosed it from Käck's neck

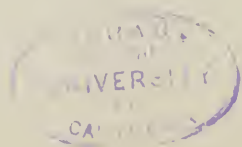
Singoalla

and put it under his pillow, for surely his dreams must be of her who had wreathed the flowers!

On the following morning Erland again put on holiday attire, buckled round his doublet a fine belt carrying his hunting-knife, and went through the woods—to the hill by the brook. It was beautiful and lonely there. The spruces were whispering, the brook was murmuring, anemones and violets were peeping out of the grass. Erland seated himself in the old place by the edge of the brook; Käck put his head on his lap. Suddenly on the other bank—as if they had planned it—came Singoalla. The wind fluttered in the folds of her short gown, her step was light and unchecked by the sight of Erland in his finery, but her smile was kindly and she nodded cheerfully, lifted each foot to take off her shoes, and then waded across the brook straight to Erland. The brook was shallow, and a few silvery pearls splashed from it to the red pearls round the girl's ankles. Erland felt no shyness, but gladness only—gladness unspoiled by ceremony. He did not rise and salute Singoalla, as other girls he knew. But his heart smiled in his eyes as Singoalla reached



Erland and Singoalla.



Erland and Singoalla

the bank, put her hands on his shoulders, and said:

“I did not prophesy aright. We meet again. Your father is good to mine, so we, too, will be friends!”

“Yes. Singoalla, I have been longing for you ever since we saw each other here the first time. I have often dreamed of you, and if dreams speak truth, you are not angry with me!”

“No,” answered Singoalla, seating herself on the bank beside Erland; “when I left you I was angry no more. I thought you the handsomest boy I had ever seen; even when angry you were not ugly. In all our folk there is not one so handsome as you. Assim, who wants me for his wife, is as nought to you.”

“Who is Assim?”

“He is the son of him who was chief before my father. . . .”

“And Assim wants you to be his wife?”

“Yes; but no more of Assim. You said you dreamed of me. I dreamed that I should find you here, and so I came. I dream more truly than I tell fortunes, which angers me, for to tell fortunes

Singoalla

aright is an honour to us women. But the art of fortune-telling is not for the young. Let me see the lines of your hand . . . no, I will not . . . If you were doomed to be unhappy, it would grieve me. Oh, what hair you have!"—Singoalla passed her hand through Erland's curls—"not black like mine and my kinsmen's."

Her talk shifted from one thing to another. She spoke of the wanderings of her people, and how glad she was when her father and his men agreed that the meeting-place between the scattered bands should be on the lands of Erland's father. As it happened, it was Assim who had proposed this in the men's council, and he had done it at a hint from Singoalla. He never thought that Singoalla wished this for Erland's sake, or he would not have agreed to her plan. And while she was saying this, she caressed Käck, now friendly, for in the camp on the night before he had shared Singoalla's supper, and it was she who had wreathed his neck with the garland. Käck little knew what it meant!

Erland then showed Singoalla a red pearl and a faded flower; one, he said, he had found in the clearing where her people had pitched their tents;

Erland and Singoalla

the other he had taken from the brook, which had received it from Singoalla herself.

The girl snatched away the faded flower and threw it once more into the brook.

“I will give you fresh flowers,” she said; “we will see who can gather the most.”

Erland agreed, and they vied with each other in gathering flowers on the banks of the brook. Then they compared them to see who had gathered most, and it happened that Erland had gathered most, for he had pulled off handfuls without choice, though Singoalla's were prettier.

They sat down on the slope of the hill to sort the flowers and bind them into nosegays with grass. Erland did this badly and slowly, but Singoalla had good taste in arranging flowers, and their different colours contrasted finely. Nobody had taught her the art, but she knew it all the same. When the posies were ready, Erland and Singoalla exchanged them, and the girl liked that of Erland, though it was uneven, loose, and ill-made. At last she said that she must return to the camp, or her father, Assim, and the women would be wondering where she was and search for her, and this she did not wish.

Singoalla

Then Erland said :

“Go now, Singoalla ; but come here every day, that I may see you.”

Singoalla pondered a while, and said :

“Yes, we will meet every day; but it will be best to meet here after the sun has set. There is a custom amongst us for young girls to wander alone for a while of an evening, for so they get the spirit of divination. I shall say to my father to-morrow evening, ‘I will go into the forest and learn how to tell the future.’ Then he will answer, ‘Go . . . ,’ and I shall steal away hither. The twilight is good, because if Assim or the women are in the neighbourhood they will not see us. Assim is fond of following my footsteps.”

“Is Assim big and strong?” asked Erland.

“Yes, he is bigger than you, and has a beard, and is the nimblest of our young men. He is usually good-tempered, but is easily angered; and when in anger all shun him. Blood has more than once dripped from his knife.”

“If Assim comes here, I will teach him to shun following you. Look at my arms, Singoalla,” said Erland, turning up his sleeves; “I am only seven-

Erland and Singoalla

teen, but would not my hug be too much for Assim? Let him come! I will fell him and set my foot upon him!"

"You shall not. Why do you speak so harshly of Assim? What harm has he done you? If you threaten thus, I will never come here again."

"I cannot endure him, and I hope he will not come here while we are together. The place is lonely and the forest large: why should he come here? I promise you, Singoalla, I will not fight with him, or even say an angry word to him, unless he provokes me. Are you content now, and will you promise me to come to-morrow when the sun has set behind the rocks which border the lake?"

"Oh, I promise, for you know not how I love to look on you. To-night you will come and see the camp of our people, will you not? My father expects the Knight's son to come and see him, be it from kindness or curiosity."

"I shall come, but it is best to meet you alone, Singoalla."


Singoalla held out her hands to Erland and said, "Farewell till to-morrow." They held their hands for a long time, and gazed delightedly into each

Singoalla

other's eyes. But at last, exclaiming "To-morrow! Yes, to-morrow!" they nodded gaily and hurried apart. But before Erland had reached the top of the hill and Singoalla disappeared in the forest, both turned round and nodded once more in sign of farewell and future tryst.

VI.

IN THE TWILIGHT BY THE FOREST BROOK.

HE sun was sinking behind the rocks which rim the lake; the tops of the trees were bathed in the sunset's glow; the birds were settling to rest; the monastery bell was calling the monks to Vespers and chiming over the fields, when Erland left the castle for his tryst.

So he met Singoalla every evening under the tall spruce on the hilltop when the twilight stole between the trees. They spoke much in the beginning, and played like children on the green bank. "There is no lass living as pretty as you," said Erland to Singoalla. She answered joyously, "Do you think so? Before I came I looked into a spring to see if you might think me fair."

But in a while both grew silent and looked each other in the eyes rather than talked, and they could do so in spite of the twilight, for they sat close and wound their arms round one another's necks.

Singoalla

When their glances met, lip stole to lip, and closed in long kisses which slaked and kindled desire.

Every time that Erland wandered to the hill, there rang in his heart a song that never reached his lips :

“Ah! sweet it is to meet one's Love!
But sweetest far when twilights rove
O'er field and forest.
Out yonder stands the hill where trees
Whisper so soft in evening's breeze.
Oh, heart, thou soarest !

Art there, Singoalla? Though these eyes cannot see thee,
Whence else can that fragrant perfume come, I prithee?
The forest lies silent, by man 'tis unriden,
Yet it echoes 'Singoalla,' that name comes unbidden.

Is that the dark form of fir-tree low bending?
Or rose-tree spread out to the wind's gentle tending?
My heart says, 'Singoalla here waits love's caressing,'
So I press on, to press near, with love past expressing !

Ah! sweet it is to meet one's Love!
But sweeter far when twilights rove
O'er field and forest.”

The strange folk remained in the forest-clearing longer than their chief had at first intended, for the

In the Twilight by the Forest Brook

band for which they waited delayed coming. But Erland did not think of separation, neither did Singoalla. It seemed to them as if they would always be together.

Eight days passed; and each day Singoalla had said to her father, "I will go and learn from solitude the visions of the future," and he had answered, "Go!" She had wandered in the forest to baffle Assim and lead him astray. Eight days had Erland and Singoalla met, and none but faithful Käck knew it, for a hunter passed that way rarely, least of all in the twilight, and the women of the strange folk used to draw water and bathe their children where the brook flowed nearer the clearing.

But Singoalla changed more and more during those days. She trembled when she was about to steal to the trysting-place, but still she could not help going, for her heart ached when she did not see the Knight's son. She dreamed of him by night, and thought of him by day, and she was never happy except when she felt the boy's arms about her. And yet she felt shy, she hardly knew why, and her soul raised mute cries of pain when he approached. So much was she stirred by fear and

Singoalla

longing, that sighs almost choked her voice when they sat together. She could no longer look into Erland's eyes, for it seemed as if they burned hers; and she dropped her eyes under their long lashes to the murmuring waters of the brook, or she raised them to the silently gliding stars, while Erland looked and looked at her. And yet, without being able to meet it, she felt his gaze like a sweet pain deep in her heart.

One night when they were sitting with her cheek pressed to his, his curls mingling with hers, Erland said to her:

“Sing one of the songs of your people, Singoalla.”

But Singoalla said in a whisper :

“I can no longer sing.”

“But I heard you singing when we saw each other first, and Grip wanted to bite you and I was harsh with you. Why not sing now? Are you sad?”

“Yes.”

“Why? Have I offended you?”

“You! No, Erland! I don't know why I am sad. . . . Perhaps it is because we shall part some day. . . .”

In the Twilight by the Forest Brook

“Part!” exclaimed Erland, turning pale. “Then will you not always stay here?”

“I should like to be always with you, but I must follow my father. Yes, when I think of it . . . you see, I have not thought of it before . . . but now I think I shall die when I part from you. I shall wander away, farther and farther from you, Erland. When you come here in the evening, no Singoalla will meet you. She will long to do so, and will die of her longing. Perhaps you may weep, Erland, and call my name, but I shall not be able to come. . . .”

Singoalla’s eyes filled with tears, and her bosom heaved with sobs.

Erland was pale and silent. He had not thought of parting. He let go Singoalla’s hand, and tears rose to his eyes, for the mystical tie of love had so united their hearts that joy or sorrow and every pulse-beat came to both alike. But when Singoalla saw Erland’s eyes shine with tears, she tried to smile to make him happy again, and said :

“Do not be sad! When Singoalla goes away, you will soon forget her and be happy again.”

“Forget you!” said Erland, rising. “No, I

Singoalla

shall never forget you. I will never part from you, I will follow you wherever you go."

"Will you?" cried Singoalla, and her eyes shone. "Will you leave your father and mother, the beautiful castle, and all you love, to follow me?"

"Yes," replied the boy.

"Then we can be husband and wife. You shall be my master, and I your slave. I will carry your burdens in our wanderings. At night I will cool your feet with water. When we halt I will roast your game, hand your cup when you are thirsty, sing to you when you are sad, and share all you suffer, ay, gladly, for I shall know that you love me!"

"No," said Erland, "it shall not be so. I will carry your burdens, for my shoulders are stronger than yours; I will hunt the game and gather the fruits which you love best. You shall not be my slave. I hate the thought: it is unfair and evil. But husband and wife we will be."

"Will you marry me now?" said Singoalla. "I will marry you after the custom of my people."

Singoalla drew out a small slab of stone fastened to a chain which she wore round her neck. On the



In the Twilight by the Forest Brook.



In the Twilight by the Forest Brook

stone was engraved the crescent—the symbol of *Alako*, the god of her people.

This stone she put into Erland's right hand, and asked him if he would love her as his wife until death did them part, and swear utter fidelity, the least breach of which would give her the right to take his life and by her prayers shut the gate of heaven for ever against him. Erland answered, "Yes." Then Singoalla took the stone in her right hand, made the same vow, and said, as was the custom of her people, that she would be her faithful husband's faithful slave, and bear all anger from him, but not unfaithfulness.

After this rite, Singoalla said, "Now you are my husband, and I will obey you in everything," and threw herself on her knees on the grass, raised her hands to the new moon, and spoke words in a tongue strange to Erland:

"He is mine, the only one I love! Know it, all women, and look not at him, for he is mine and scorns you all. Thanks to thee, good *Alako* in heaven, for he is mine, the only one I love!"

On any other occasion, Erland would have wondered that Singoalla called him her husband, for

Singoalla

they had exchanged no rings, had celebrated no wedding according to custom, and no blessing had been given them by a priest. But now he thought not of these things. He felt his pledge was easy to keep, for Singoalla was the one delight of his heart; he thought only of kissing her, of resting on her bosom, and following her to the end of the world.

“Sit down beside me,” said the girl, “and hear a tale my father’s people tell. They say that a man and woman who have drunk each other’s blood will feel sorrow and joy, health and weariness together and alike. That they can speak to each other in thought though they be far apart, and that their hearts are never asunder. Do you believe this?”

“I do not know, but I have heard that those who would be friends for ever have mingled their blood. Singoalla,” said Erland, “I would drink yours. And you——?”

“Ay, more eagerly than the traveller in the desert desireth the water-springs.”

Erland bared his left arm, for it is nearest the heart. He drew his hunting-knife. Singoalla

In the Twilight by the Forest Brook

asked him to leave it to her. Erland agreed, and the girl drew her dagger, pricked her lover's arm and caught with her lips the bead of his young blood. Then she bared her left arm, and with her dagger she drew a drop of her blood. Erland kissed it away, kissed her arm again and again, and drew it round his neck.

VII.

THE COMBAT.

BUT what shadow rises in the moonlight and with its silent presence threatens the lovers?

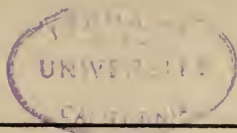
Singoalla gives a start, and cries "Assim!"

A hollow, painful laugh replies to her cry.

Erland jumped up and drew his hunting-knife in readiness to attack the stranger. Singoalla caught hold of his armed hand but he broke away from her. The dusky Assim saw the knife glimmering in the moonlight, threw off his cloak, made a spring backwards, while his hand searched for the dagger in his belt, and said:

"The daughter of the chief and the son of the lord of the castle! Unhappy Singoalla! The women in the camp will scoff at you, and the men despise you! . . ."

With these words he aimed the dagger at Erland's head. But Assim's hand missed; wrath



The Combat

and the twilight put the skilful dagger-thrower to shame. Erland rushed at him with uplifted knife. Assim sprang nimbly backwards; he stretched out his arms, his black eyes followed the threatening weapon, his fingers opened to seize, in the nick of time, Erland's uplifted hand, and his supple body bent to avoid by an unexpected side-leap a thrust, should his hand not ward it off.

"Assim is unarmed—mercy for Assim!" cried Singoalla, wildly passing her hands through her hair.

"Are you unarmed?" asked Erland, lowering his hand.

"Yes," replied Assim, "but I am a man."

Erland threw his hunting-knife on the grass in order to fight weaponless, in the old Norse way, a weaponless man.

Erland, the fair Norseman, was seventeen, beardless, and not full-grown; Assim, the swarthy descendant of the people of the Ganges, had been wandering for twenty-six summers, not counting the two that his mother had carried him on her back. They rushed against each other, lifted their arms, and pressed breast to breast; their veins swelled, their muscles strained from head to foot.

Singoalla

But the issue is decided. Erland threw the dark stranger to the ground; his knee pressed hard against the breast of his foe, and his hand grasped his throat.

The girl rushed up to check the victor's wrath and plead for pardon for the vanquished. Erland listened, relaxed his grasp, and rose.

Assim rose also, with his eyes fixed on the ground. He took his cloak, wrapped himself in it, and stole away.

"Woe is me!" cried Singoalla. "He will tell the whole story to the camp. My father will beat me, the men despise me, and the women deride me!"

"No," said Erland, "that shall never happen!"

"No," repeated Singoalla, "for we are man and wife."

"Come," said Erland, "I will follow you to the camp and speak to your father. With me at your side, Singoalla, you shall have nothing to fear."

"Husband!" said the girl.

"My wife!" said the boy, and lifting her in his arms, he carried her across the brook, and went with her into the forest.



The Combat.



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VIII.

THE CAMP.

THE forest that surrounded the clearing looked in the dark like an impenetrable black wall on which rested the star-strown canopy of heaven. In the open field log-fires were burning with flickering flames, and in their light shadows were seen moving, while here and there a tent peeped out. There was a swarm of men, women, children, horses, and dogs; a buzz of voices from deepest bass to shrillest treble, singing, music of stringed instruments, strident sound of pipes, beat of drums, barking of dogs, the voices of men in quiet talk, the high-pitched voices of women quarrelling, the blows of a hammer falling on some cracked copper kettle, or fashioning pieces of red-hot iron into horse-shoes or arrow-heads—all blent into an ear-piercing, confused, and confounding discord. With her hand in his—a mark

Singoalla

for curious looks and speeches in gibberish he did not understand, amidst groups of men who were eating, drinking, dicing, grinding knives and swords; amidst women who were stirring pots, feeding children, mending clothes, chattering and quarrelling; amidst bare-limbed boys and half-naked girls at play, or boxing each other's ears and scratching one another, laughing and weeping; amidst horses and carts, barrels, household utensils and tools, and with Singoalla for his guide—Erland moved on to the tent of the chief, the father of Singoalla.

That same evening, whilst Singoalla was with Erland, the long-awaited party had arrived, and the chief had announced that the camp was to break up on the morning of the second day after. Hence the unwonted stir.

The chief's tent stood southward near the edge of the forest. Here neither the noise nor the throng was so great. The oldest and best men of the tribe were there assembled; there were also a few women conversing eagerly in a low voice, when Erland and Singoalla approached. These women were Assim's mother,

The Camp

sisters, and kindred; they all fixed their eyes on the chief's daughter when she walked past them at Erland's side. The old woman, Assim's mother, looked by the firelight, perhaps even by daylight, an ugly witch. Her long crooked nose seemed to have grown out of her face to spite her eyes and hollow cheeks—just as, in an earthquake, mountains arise and the land around them sinks. Her red eyes flamed, and her lips, which, withered and flabby, hung round her toothless jaws, grinned loathsomely. The grim face of the crone showed rage and lust for revenge, for Assim had already told her about what had happened to him at the brook; but it also showed wonder when she saw the Knight's son at Singoalla's side.

At the sight of Erland the oldest of the tribe rose and bowed. In the inlet to the tent stood the chief himself, conversing with Assim. Both seemed surprised at the arrival of the fair youth. Assim slunk off, sending Singoalla a gloomy side-glance. The chief laid his hands on his forehead and bowed to Erland, but his half-downcast eyes sent, between their black eyelashes, a flashing look at his daughter.

Singoalla

The girl was pale, but she did not tremble, for her hand rested in Erland's.

Erland said he wished to speak with the chief without other witness than Singoalla. The chief took him to his tent without a word.

What was said there no one knows, but after half-an-hour Erland left the tent with calm on his forehead, accompanied by Singoalla, who proudly met the looks of Assim's mother and the other women, and by the chief, whose face bore traces of uneasy thoughts. When he had got a little way into the forest, Erland shook hands with the chief, kissed Singoalla, and said :

“ I shall be ready at the appointed time.”

IX.

THE BREAKING-UP OF THE CAMP.

“**W**HAT is the matter with Erland? He is gloomy and speaks little,” said Lady Elfrida to her husband, the good knight Bengt.

“He is suffering from loneliness,” replied the Knight, thoughtfully taking a draught from his cup, and looking away to the blue mountain-tops, which he could see through the narrow window,—“he is suffering from loneliness, and no wonder. The forest is no longer a fit place for him; we must send him this autumn to the king’s court to learn courtly manners and knightly training.”

Lady Elfrida broke up the talk when it touched that string, for it was with melancholy only that she could think of the moment when young Erland should leave his father and mother and go out into the wide world.

Erland, however, was now sitting in the library

Singoalla

of the monastery beside Father Henry, reading by the dim light from the lofty arched window the *Bucolics* of Virgil; and when the shepherd Melibœus complained :

*“Nos patriæ fines et dulcia linquimus arva,”*¹

Erland's heart joined in the lament, and he listened with wandering mind to the Father's exposition of the poet, though this exposition was far more spirited than the dry commentaries of Maurus Servius, which were written in red on the margin of the folio.

Erland had, before he went to the monastery, roved through every corner of the castle, spoken a kindly word to all the servants, and visited all the playgrounds of his childhood, not forgetting the cliff from which he used to dive into the lake. He had visited these places to say farewell, and now, for the first time, he felt how dear they were to him, though he had many a time longed to leave them for the wide world.

He thought of his father and his beloved mother. He thought of the monk, his kindly

¹ We are leaving our country's bounds and pleasant fields.

The Breaking-up of the Camp

teacher, who was sitting by his side, and he blessed him silently for the knowledge of the art of writing he had gained through him. And thus Erland consoled himself: "I shall soon gladden my parents' heart with a letter telling them why I left them, that I am well, and shall soon return a proud knight, rich in the glory of doughty deeds."

For this purpose he had torn a leaf from a breviary and hidden it about him; on this leaf the letter was to be written.

"You are tired now," said Father Henry, observing Erland's mind wandered; "well, we will stop here . . . *claudite jam rivos, pueri, sat prata biberunt.*"¹

The Father shut the book and chained and locked it again in the bookcase.

"Farewell," said Erland, pressing the Father's hand. "My good teacher," he added, "I would fain have your blessing to-night."

The monk laid his hand on Erland's head, bestowed a benediction, and pressed him to his bosom as he was wont.

Now a noise was heard outside the walls.

¹ Lads, shut the sluices, the fields have drunk enough.

Singoalla

Brother John, the janitor, opened the door a little, and informed the Prior that a crowd of the strange people, led by their chief, craved admission in order to thank the Prior for his kindness and to say farewell, for towards noon on the following day they intended to break up the camp. They had already been at Ekö, and conveyed to the Knight their grateful thanks for the hospitality he had shown them.

The Father answered, "Let them come!"

In the meantime Erland put his cloak on his shoulders and walked off.

Father Henry received the spokesmen of the strange people in the refectory of the monastery. All the monks were present. The chief stepped forth, bowed, and spoke. The Father replied to his words eloquently. Everything was done in a grave and at the same time friendly manner. But while the chief and the Father were speaking, the eyes of the men wandered about the walls of the room, and finally fastened on the glittering vessels on the oak table, and with no less interest on the images of the Blessed Virgin and Child placed in the embrasures. But it was surely not

The Breaking-up of the Camp

devotion which gleamed in their eyes when they saw the golden crown of the Queen of Heaven and the silver ornaments that in fair ogives and rosettes surrounded it. Nor was it, surely, the heat of the room that made one of the men, concealed behind the others, undo the fastenings of the windows nearest to the door; for if heat had been the cause, he would no doubt have opened it, which he did not.

We leave the monastery and repair to the castle to witness Erland's silent farewell. The evening was far advanced, and the music of the monastery bells, the signal for rest for the inhabitants of the castle, had long ago chimed over the lake, and, softly borne by the echo from the rocks, had sunk to rest in the forest. Bengt and Elfrida were already slumbering; the night-lamp in the sleeping-chamber gave a dim light from its niche in the wall, whence shadows fluttered vaguely round the curtains of the alcove, where they gathered darker and deeper. The door of the banqueting-hall stood ajar; then it gently opened wide. Hidden by the darkness, Erland paused on the threshold. He wanted to steal up to the old folk, look on their

Singoalla

faces once more, and bid them farewell so softly that they might feel it as in a dream. But the sleep of old age is light, and they might awake. Fear fought with the desire of his heart, and he dared not enter. He leaned his forehead against the door-post and listened to the breath of the dear ones asleep. His cheek was pale, and his eyes filled with tears. He returned by the way he came. He hastened, for it seemed as if the statues of the saints in the corridors and landings stirred and stretched out their hands to him. He called Käck, and waded the strait which separated the island from the land, for the drawbridge, as was the custom at night, was up; then penetrated farther and farther into the forest, accompanied by his faithful dog. He wore his meanest clothes, and there was not a coin in the pocket of his threadbare tunic. The belt which girded his waist, and the hunting-knife which hung from it, were the only things of value that he took away with him from his father's castle.

The chief of the strangers had said to Bengt and the Prior that his people would march on the following day at noon. He had perhaps a reason

The Breaking-up of the Camp

for saying so to them; but to Erland he had said: "Come before midnight, or you will come too late."

Everything was already prepared for breaking up the camp when Erland came to the clearing. Singoalla had been expecting him anxiously. Now she received him with a cry of joy, where, wrapped up in a motley cloak, she was sitting in her father's waggon on a bed of quilts and holding in the little shaggy nags which were restlessly pawing the ground. Behind stood a long row of waggons, drawn by horses or oxen, and crammed with women, children, and household stuff. The married men stood muffled in their cloaks beside the waggons, each one beside the goods left in his charge, or near to his own. The young unmarried men were drawn up in the rear, armed with spears, bows, and knives. The abandoned fires lit up the picture. Torch-bearers were stationed at the head of the waggons.

The chief walked back from his own waggons, which were the first, down to the last, in order to make sure that all was right. He had strongly urged his people to haste, his look was uneasy, and he, usually so courteous, had scarcely taken the

Singoalla

trouble to salute with a careless nod the new member of his band, his daughter's husband and the Knight's son. Erland hardly noticed this, for he had eyes only for Singoalla. After the chief had made his round, he gave the signal for departure with a bell. The torches flickered between the spruces, one waggon after another disappeared in the black forest, and soon the clearing was empty.

The caravan advanced as fast as the darkness and the rough ground allowed. Singoalla had alighted from her waggon and walked beside Erland, who led her team by the reins. The stars twinkled over the tops of the trees, and the lovers heard a monotonous, melancholy, sweet song, sung by one of those who followed. Between rugged rocks and through silent valleys the train moved on during the short summer night.

Eastward the darkness was beginning to pale. It was broken by a cold half-light, a softly-brightening dawn, in which the stars grew dim and disappeared.

Assim, who all night long had been on horseback, pulled up at his mother's waggon, covered her up with a cloak as a protection against the

The Breaking-up of the Camp

morning chill and spoke words befitting a son, but with half-averted face, as was his wont when speaking to her. He felt degraded by being brought into the world by her. She herself had taught him this thought, and nourished it by speaking often and often of her mud-dark blood, and of his father's cleaner red blood; of his grandfather's cleaner yet, and his great-grandfather's, cleanest red of all red blood. "You are of the blood of the holy immolators, Assim. Your ancestors had golden hair and eyes blue as the corn-flower. They were the peers of the gods, and their shadow was fraught with blessing. You are the only one of this wandering band owning priestly and royal lineage. Your father's great-grandfather was fair-haired, I have heard, and he remembered and understood all legends in his ancient and holy language, in which he blessed the brides, children, herds, and fires of our people. Your grandfather was dark, but not so dark as your father, and even when he was a hundred years old he could read and understand some of their old and potent prayers. Your father, who was unwilling and slow to learn, though ready and quick to command, remembered and understood only a few of

Singoalla

their words—more, however, than he has given you for heritage. You are darker than your father. You are a mule, Assim. Your mother's blood, the blood of your grandmother and great-grandmother, have made the descendant of the sun-horse a mule. The sons of the gods, who guided the wandering people out of Assaria had no daughters of gods to make mothers of."

Thus she had spoken to her son ever since his childhood. Assim sorrowed over his dark blood, and blamed it for words and deeds of which he was ashamed and repented. But of the clean red there remained in his veins at least so much that it could make itself felt and get the better of him in the hours of dawn. Then there would come from his lips words that astonished his tribe, and were admired by Singoalla, but for which neither she nor the others gave Assim honour, because they believed that it was his ancestors who spoke through his mouth.

Assim rode back to the rearguard. On Erland and Singoalla he did not bestow a glance. With rapture, mixed with a strange pain, he gazed eastward, towards the source of dawn, over which a

The Breaking-up of the Camp

pale red was spreading. It was quivering into an ever-warming glow. The red from being pale grew stronger and deeper till it turned to bright rose edged with silver; then this was hidden with a border of molten gold, and its glory awakened the birds to exultant life, and spread a glitter of pearl and rainbow over moss and grass and dew.

Assim had alighted from his horse. He gazed with transfigured countenance at the glorious radiance heralding the rising sun, and said:

“*Usas, Usas*, daughter of heaven, hail to thee, maid of Dawn! The soldiers of light, thy champions, burnish their weapons, yoke their red horses to thy chariot, and open for thee the gate of heaven! Seize thou the reins of the holy Universe and soar with shining many-hued wheels the way by law prescribed, lovely forerunner of glorious *Sûrya!* In thee is the spirit of all things living. Thou awakest to life all that hath breath. The powers of darkness flee at sight of thee, Dawn, proud virgin, all-conquering and joying in thy loveliness.”

The edge of the sun now appeared, and, as if in haste, the whole of the dazzling disc rose from the horizon, and it then continued to rise

Singoalla

more slowly. Assim lowered his forehead and prayed :

“*Sûrya*, chase away the darkness which reigns in my soul when all earth is bathing in thy brightness! Sun, glorious queen,¹ listen from thy flashing chariot on high to the son of those who have made thee a thousand songs, a thousand offerings! Have pity on me! I am a man shamed by unanswered love. There is a poison in my blood. Ruin and death seize the white man, whom she, who hath bewitched me, adores! In the midst of thy radiance there is night over my eyes. *Sûrya*, Queen, pity me! Drop a sick man a leaf from the wreath of healing flowers which adorns thy shining brow! Wilt thou not give me Singoalla's heart? If not, lay me among those who have once beheld thy glory and behold it no more!”

“This is pleasant wandering,” thought Erland, and his breast swelled with a feeling that cried, “Onward, on through the beautiful world!” He looked at Singoalla; she was like a newly-opened rose, fresh with the morning dew.

¹ *Sûrya*, sun, is feminine in Sanscrit.



The Breaking-up of the Camp: Assim.



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The Breaking-up of the Camp

But morning had not chased away the cloud that rested on the chief's brow. In his heart also a feeling cried, "Onward!" but it was a feeling of unrest. He hastened untiringly from waggon to waggon, urging the men to haste. Hour after hour passed, and the sun was already high; the horses were bathed in sweat, the women were tired and grumbling. But the chief shouted, "Onward!" The whips cracked over the tired beasts, and the waggon-wheels creaked on their worn axles.

"Chief," said Erland to Singoalla's father, "will you not call a halt? Do you not see that the beasts need rest, and fodder, and water? Look, yonder flows a brook. Let us water the horses and oxen there!"

"There," said the chief, pointing towards a gently sloping height which was near, "there we will rest."

He made no further answer, for at that moment a horseman rode up to him at full speed. It was Assim. He whispered something in the chief's ear. The latter's face darkened still more, and his eyes darted a look of alarm. He said not a

Singoalla

word, but beckoned some of the older men to him, and gave certain commands in a low voice.

Meanwhile the caravan advanced up the wooded hill. The top was level. Here the beasts were unharnessed, the waggons ranged and tied together with ropes in a ring. Within this the people and horses were now gathered. Weapons were got out and arranged round a huge oak which stood in the middle of a green lawn. Erland, wondering, asked the chief what this meant.

“A people that has many enemies must be watchful,” said he, and so saying he went to a secret council of the older men, while the younger ones foddered the horses, and the women carried water from a spring or cooked food.

The young girls of the tribe gathered round Singoalla. They chatted merrily and looked with furtive glances at the fair youth, whom they all deemed handsome, and whom each, in her heart, would have had for husband. “You are happy, Singoalla,” they said, and Singoalla nodded joyfully. But among the young girls who talked with Singoalla there were none of Assim’s sisters or

The Breaking-up of the Camp

kinswomen. They had gathered together apart, and Assim's mother was in their midst.

In the meantime Erland examined the weapons laid against the oak, bent the bows to try their strength, felt the edge of the swords, and sang a merry ballad.

"It is lucky we have him amongst us," said an elderly man to the chief. "He shall be our hostage."

"But he is a danger," said another; "it is an enemy in our midst."

"A sleeping-draught!" whispered the chief.

After the council was ended Assim went away and spoke with his mother.

Then he again mounted his nag, and rode, accompanied by three or four young fellows on horseback, out of the camp down the slope of the hill.

The women now brought food and laid it on the grass. The band gathered in groups round the dishes. The chief, his kin, and the oldest of the band ate their meal under the oak. Erland was invited to sit by the side of the chief; Singo-alla took her seat beside Erland. A sister of

Singoalla

Assim's waited on the company. The chief made needless excuse for the scantiness of the meal; but Erland broke his bread and shared it with Singoalla.

But if the food was scanty, the same could not be said of the drink. Assim's sister brought cups for the company, and the three cups set before the chief, Erland, and Singoalla, were of the finest silver, skilfully wrought. Erland fancied he knew them, and cried in astonishment:

"How like these goblets are to some which I have seen in the monastery! Yes, this one looks to me wonderfully like the Sacred Chalice that stands on the monastery altar, filled with Sacramental wine."

Singoalla turned pale, and lowered her eyes, for she guessed what had happened. But Assim's sister filled the cups. All, except Singoalla, drank, and Erland found the taste delicious.

Confused cries were now heard, and there was a stir in the camp! Assim had returned; he hastened to the chief and conversed with him in a low tone.

"What is the matter?" said Erland.

The Breaking-up of the Camp

“We are about to hold a sham-fight,” replied the chief coldly, ordering Singoalla off to the other women. These, together with all the children, had assembled apart on a spot inside the enclosure. Singoalla walked away, her cheek pale, and her eyes downcast.

The men gathered round the oak and armed themselves. The chief led Erland into the crowd and asked him to make his choice before the best weapons were taken. But as Erland stooped down, the chief gave a sign; a rope was thrown round him, and before he was aware of their treachery, the rope was twisted round his arms and legs so that he could neither struggle nor move. His eyes flashed, his veins swelled; but the chief said to the men, “Tie him up to the oak!”

When this was done all rushed to the waggons. A cry was heard from the crowd of women; it came from Singoalla as soon as she was aware of what had happened. She wished to hasten to Erland, but Assim’s mother caught hold of the girl’s hair with her skinny fingers, and hissed: “You have brought shame and disaster on us.

Singoalla

Woe to you, woe to you! Your fair lover shall die, he shall be torn to pieces, he shall be slain by poison . . . yes, the poisoned draught, mixed by my hands, is now raging in his bowels. Look at his head sinking on his breast, his cheeks turning yellow as the poisonous buttercup . . . the draught is working already."

And while she thus spoke, the other women seized hold of Singoalla's arms and the folds of her gown, and showered curses on her.

There was another besides Singoalla to whom the sight of Erland's ill-treatment would have been unbearable. That was Käck, but he had also been provided for. While Erland was sitting at meat, one of the men had enticed Käck from the barricade into the forest, and there tied him to a tree.

From without came shouts and the clash of arms. A troop of foes was marching up the hill. Already an arrow, the first messenger of the fight, whizzed through the air. The women crowded more closely together, pressed their children close to their breasts, and sent frightened glances towards the side of the enclosure where the men stood



Erland tied to the Tree.



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The Breaking-up of the Camp

awaiting the attack with bows bent and spears ready.

“No mercy on the sacrilegious villains!” rang out a voice; “cut them all down!”

It was Father Henry addressing a troop of Bengt’s people who, armed with axe, bow, and spear, had marched out in pursuit of the strangers.

Father Henry rode a little grey pony; round his habit he had buckled on a belt, in which hung a sheath. He carried the sword in his hand.

The Knight, too, accompanied his men, but he was unarmed, for he thought it was hardly worth while putting on armour or disturbing the repose of his good sword for a fight of this sort. He marched at the head of his people, leaning on a stick, as if he was out looking after his fields and meadows.

He turned to his people and strengthened the monk’s words by saying :

“Yes, cut down the rabble, and spare none except the women and children! They have ill-requited my hospitality. They have swept the monastery clean, and not even spared the Blessed Virgin’s crown or the chalice of the Mass. Swing

Singoalla

your axes, lads, as if you were felling trees in the forest.”

But before the troop had reached the enclosure, Assim, on a sign from the chief, had walked up to the oak where Erland, almost swooning from the draught, stood bound. Assim held a dagger in his hand. Sallow and trembling, he held its point against Erland's breast.

“Ho, there!” shouted the chief, who had mounted a waggon. “What do you seek? Are you come as enemies? If so, let us parley and see if the matter can be settled as among friends.”

“No parley, sacrilegious scoundrel!” shouted the Father, riding up towards the enclosure so fast that his people were unable to follow him.

“Look there and relent,” said the chief, pointing to the oak which was visible high on the hilltop above the barricade.

“Erland!” exclaimed the Father, turning pale.

“Yes, the Knight's son. If you approach one step more, I will give a sign and the dagger shall be plunged into his breast.”

“My curse upon you, heathen!” shouted the Father.

The Breaking-up of the Camp

“One step!” said the chief, raising his hand. Assim lifted the dagger, and wondered as he felt a great lust for blood.

“Stop!” cried the Father, beckoning to the chief, to the Knight and his people, who had already formed for an assault upon the wagons.

“What now?” asked the Knight.

“There! look! stop! Not a step forward!”

Bengt, too, turned pale and had scarcely strength to shout to his people:

“Stand back!”

“A parley? Yes or no?” asked the chief, while his dark men, turning one to the other, half resolute, half trembling, were awaiting the beginning of the fight.

“A parley!” said the Knight.

“Do you allow us to depart unharmed?”

“Yes.”

“With all that we possess? Mind, what we have taken we hold to be our own! We think our right to all we take thus, good. Is it free departure with all that we possess?”

The Knight did not reply, but silently fixed his eyes on Father Henry.

Singoalla

“Surrender at least the chalice of the Mass and the golden crown! The rest you may keep,” said the Father with a sigh.

“Nay,” rejoined the chief. “Let us not be mean. Free departure with all we have got, and the lad shall be surrendered unhurt, if you swear upon your Saviour’s image neither to harry us in the least yourselves, nor set on others to do so.”

“I will, to the utmost of my power, indemnify the monastery for its loss,” whispered Bengt to the Father, with a glance of utter dread at Assim’s uplifted dagger. “Let us take the oath, and let them depart.”

With another sigh, Father Henry produced a crucifix which he carried by a chain round his neck.

“All for the dear boy’s sake. But how has he fallen into their hands? I do not understand it.”

The Knight and the Father both took the required oath.

“Lower the dagger, and loose the prisoner,” shouted the chief to Assim.

“No, no!” cried out several voices. “Do not

The Breaking-up of the Camp

surrender our hostage! They will attack and slay us."

"Calm yourselves," said the chief in the language of his people. "These northern men are a queer people. They hold to what they promise, even without oath and hand-clasp. And, at least, are we not ready for defence? . . . Gentle sir," said the chief to Bengt, "do not believe that we have by force taken your son with us! He has come into our camp himself to accompany us in our wandering through the world, for he has fallen in love with my daughter, and will not be parted from her."

"You lie," said the Knight. "But I will not bandy words with you. Begone, and fear the punishment of Heaven!"

"Yes, begone, Amalekite!" shouted Father Henry.

The chief bowed, as was his custom, and put his hand to his forehead.

Meanwhile, Erland was unbound from the tree and led forth by two men. His face was sallow, his gait tottering, and his wits wandered so that he did not know where he was nor what had

Singoalla

happened. They had to lift him over the waggons, and when he was outside the barricade and with his friends, he sank down on the ground.

“What have you done to my son?” cried out the Knight in great fear, lifting up Erland’s head and looking at him keenly.

“Nothing,” replied the chief from his defences. “Perhaps fright has done this.”

“Fright!” repeated the Knight with flashing eyes. “*My* son frightened by your treacherous daggers? No, he never was afraid, can never be afraid.”

“May be,” observed Father Henry, “wrath at being bound has exhausted the strength of the boy.”

And so Erland was brought home to the castle of Ekö, and the Knight and the Prior returned with their following.

No sooner had they marched away, and the chief had sent out spies to assure himself that they had gone indeed, than he ordered Singoalla to be brought before him.

The girl, who had hitherto fought vainly to escape from the hands of the women, threw herself at her father’s feet. Her long hair flowed in wild

The Breaking-up of the Camp

disorder; her face bled from the scratches which the old witch, Assim's mother, had given her; her gown was in rags.

Assim's mother and the other women ran after her, and gathered screaming round the chief. The men also flocked together to the spot.

"Justice! justice!" yelled Assim's mother. "Have things come to this, that the son of a dead chief, the seed of the gods, should be insulted by the daughter of the living chief? Is Assim not good enough for Singoalla? Wait; our tribe is strong . . . our kin is so noble that, compared to it, yours is as dirt to the lustre of the sun."

"Stay your tongue, crone," said the chief, "or I will cut it out of your throat! Did I ever forget what justice demands?"

"My father," cried Singoalla, twining her arms round his waist, "the fair youth is my husband. We have sworn troth to each other on Alako's image; you can never take him from me."

"She raves," said the chief. "Where is Assim?"

"I am here."

Singoalla

“Fetch a pitcher!”

The pitcher was brought by a woman. The chief lifted it up.

“Assim,” he said, “I give you my daughter in marriage, and in token thereof I break this——”

“Stop,” cried Assim, “you know not if I will take her. I do not covet an apple that another has bitten.”

The chief knit his brows and pressed his lips together. But the fear of Assim’s family, which was held in superstitious dread, turned the violence of his wrath from Assim, who had cruelly insulted him, against Singoalla.

“Begone!” he cried out, thrusting her away. “I will show how a chief should do justice, and cursed be the tongue that dare upbraid me for unfairness! Daughter, you have scorned the descendant of one of the ten princes that led our people out of Assaria, the country of their forefathers. You knew you were set apart to be Assim’s wife, but you left him for a stranger. Then seek this stranger, his love or coldness, his pity or hate, but seek nothing more at our hands!

The Breaking-up of the Camp

You are an outcast from our band. Go to your stranger!"

Hearty cheers from Assim's kindred and friends, who formed the majority of the band, greeted these words.

The chief had by this deed made sure his threatened headship. That was the purpose he had in view. Wrath, too, had a share in it. But now that sentence was pronounced, he felt a sting in his heart, and he expected that voices would be raised in defence of Singoalla.

But all exulted—all except Assim, who stood silent, and two young girls, Singoalla's playmates, who stepped forth, embraced her, and wept.

From the rest there was only heard applause which pierced the chief's very soul.

"Our chief is just!" shouted the men.

But Assim's mother danced round Singoalla, pointing at her with her finger. And the other women, both the older ones, who thought of Assim for their own daughters, and the younger, who envied Singoalla's beauty and approved the thoughts of their mothers, cried, "Go! Away with you to your stranger!"

Singoalla

Singoalla pushed the hair from her forehead, turned to her father, and said :

“I will go, father. Yes, I go willingly to the fair boy, for I love him, and he loves me ; he is my husband, and I am his wife. But you I love, too, and after I have found my husband, I shall seek you out, for you cannot cast me away for ever—your goodness will not suffer it.”

So Singoalla turned and went forth from the camp.

X.

THE NIGHT.

THE girl wandered through the forest, following the tracks which the waggons of her people had made. Twilight was brooding over the earth, when, tired, hesitating, and trembling, she saw the castle of Ekö raise its tower over the grey lake. The drawbridge was up, and she dared not by calling announce her presence. The girl sat down on a stone by the shore, buried her face in her hands, and wept. She thought of many things—her father's wrath, the women's scoffs, but most of Assim's mother's words when she said that she had filled the fair youth's cup with poison.

“She lied, yes, she lied,” said Singoalla to herself, for she wished to drive away this terrible thought.

At length she was aroused from her sad musing by stealthy steps. She saw several men approach.

Singoalla

She rose, and they sprang out to catch her and bring her to the lord of the castle. They had recognised in her a woman belonging to the band of sacrilegious heathens and poisoners which they had pursued that day under the guidance of the Knight, their lord, and of the Father.

Then fear seized Singoalla's heart, and she fled into the forest. Arrows whizzed around her in the air. None hit her, but she heard them, and she fled—fled as fast as her panting bosom allowed. For long she heard behind her footsteps and shouts, but it was only the wind which had just begun to sweep through the forest. Sometimes she stopped terrified, for the darkness confused her and made her see an enemy in each queerly-shaped bush, and with a cry, and pressing her hands against her throbbing heart, she would fly again like a hunted doe, without knowing whither. The sky was covered with black clouds which made the gloom deeper; the wind rose, and rain began to fall. Sounds whistled through the rocks and rattled in the trees as if all nature took voice to threaten and frighten her. Yet the raindrops fell coolingly on her burning forehead and gave her strength to speed

The Night

on; but at last strength and feeling failed her, and she sank down on the moss under a pine-tree.

When she awoke to consciousness and looked around, she did not know where she was. The darkness had wrapped everything in an impenetrable veil, the storm was roaring, and the rain fell in torrents. She called her father's name, she called Erland's name, but her voice died away through the wild music of the night. Then she heard a howl in her neighbourhood. "That's a wolf," she thought; "he is howling with hunger! He may as well kill me, for my father has put me away, and Erland is poisoned by Assim's mother." Thinking thus, Singoalla rose and went in the direction from whence the howl came. She heard it quite close now . . . she saw something move under a tree . . . she approached . . . she felt a shaggy beast put his paws on her breast . . . she sank to the ground . . . the animal stood over her, sniffed at her face, licked it with his soft tongue, and gave a joyous cry.

"Käck!" she cried.

It was the faithful hound which one of the wandering people had tied to a tree outside the

Singoalla

enclosure of waggons, before they played their treachery on Erland.

“Ah! my good Käck, you are not a wolf, you will not kill me!” said Singoalla. “But you are Erland’s dog, and I love you.”

Then Singoalla saw that Käck was tied, and she released him from the tree.

“Now stay with me,” she went on to say, clasping him round the neck, “for, good Käck, I am dreadfully lonely, much afraid, and very unhappy. My father has sent me away from him, and Erland is perhaps dead. But if he is alive, we cannot meet, for his father and all his kinsfolk, nay, all white men are angry with me and want to kill me. My father is a robber, and my kinsfolk are poisoners. Oh, good Käck, I am alone and so unfortunate!”

So spoke Singoalla and wept. But Käck disengaged himself and disappeared in the darkness. Even he abandoned her. He did not understand her; he was hungry, and longed, no doubt, for his master. But he soon came back and put his head on Singoalla’s lap. He wanted only to move freely a little while, for he had been tied up long. He

The Night

stayed the whole night with Singoalla, listening patiently to her complaints, just as if he understood them, and licking her hands again and again, the only way by which he could express his sympathy.

Towards morning Singoalla sank into an unquiet slumber. Her tender body shook with cold and weariness. She was aroused by Käck's barking. A man stood before her.

"Assim!" she exclaimed, gazing blankly at him.

"Yes, it is Assim, unhappy Singoalla," he said.
"I have been seeking you the whole night."

"What do you want with me?"

"To save you, Singoalla; to keep you from falling into the hands of the white men. You are alone, unfortunate child, are you not? You are hungry; here is bread! You are cold; here is my cloak! Stand up, Singoalla. If you do not love Assim, let him at least save you. You are abandoned by your father, but I cannot abandon you."

"Leave me! You and your mother have killed my Erland. You are hateful in my eyes."

Assim made no reply and hid his face in his hands.

Singoalla

“Assim,” exclaimed Singoalla hurriedly, “you are good, I will not turn you away. No, I will follow you and I will love you, if you will only grant me one wish.”

“You know I would die for you; I will do all that you want, only I cannot leave you,” said Assim with a slight gleam of joy in his dark face.

“Go to the castle and return here with Erland! Do not come back without him! Do not dare to come without him!”

“Your Erland is dead,” said Assim, his heart cruelly rent by these words.

“You are lying.”

“No, when I sought you I also was in the neighbourhood of the castle. I heard people talking and saying that he was dead.”

“Go then from my face and let me die,” implored Singoalla, leaning her head against the trunk of the pine.

Assim stood motionless, his bosom heaved with sighs.

Singoalla, too, was silent, and sat motionless with her forehead pressed against the hard bark of the pine-tree.



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The Night.



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The Night

Then Assim at last approached her, lifted her into his arms and carried her some little distance. On the same hill where the barricade of waggons had lately been, Assim had two horses in readiness. He wrapped Singoalla up in his cloak, tied her to one of the horses, took the reins, vaulted on to the other horse, and rode towards the south.

Käck followed Assim and Singoalla.

XI.

THE POISONED DRAUGHT.

HEN Assim said that Erland was dead, he lied out of jealousy and from an impulse to save Singoalla.

But Erland was near death; and it needed a mighty effort of his vigorous constitution and Father Henry's medical science to triumph over the poisoned draught. The Father discovered the cause of his sickness; the crisis soon enough appeared, and Erland's life was from that moment out of danger. But the effects were long continued and of a terrible character, for his intellect, and especially his memory of the past, were almost extinguished. He hardly recognised his father and mother. The Prior sat during the long days of the illness at his bedside and amused him with tales. He listened and caught with difficulty the thread of the simple stories. The tales which the Father told he chose with special purpose. They

The Poisoned Draught

turned exclusively on young knights who had been bewitched by mountain elves and witches, and who had drunk deep draughts from poisoned horns of love and forgetfulness of the past. In Erland's soul these elves and witches by-and-by took the shape of a young and beautiful girl on whose image he at first smiled, but who soon struck him as being mysterious and terrible. This girl was Singoalla.

Sometimes Singoalla's name escaped his lips ; but this happened unknowingly, and the sound of her name, once so beloved, now penetrated, as if it had come from another's lips, into his soul and filled it with anguish.

He recollected in a confused way the adventure he had met in the camp of the wandering people ; he felt his arms tied, and saw a dagger aimed at his breast. But the hand that seemed to him to be brandishing this dagger belonged sometimes to a dark man with ghastly eyes, at another time to a girl-witch, and this girl was Singoalla.

Again, his imagination played with the fragments of a more beautiful past. He sometimes imagined himself carried to the hill beside the

Singoalla

brook, and there saw himself gathering flowers in company with a girl who struck him as being sweet and lovable.

But this girl's face was not that of Singoalla. It bore the gentle features of Helen Ulf sax. And this was not to be wondered at, for Helen Ulf sax often watched by the sick youth's bed, and his eyes then reflected her face.

At last Erland was so far restored to health as to be able to go out. Leaning on his mother's arm, and accompanied by the fair-haired Helen, he wandered into the fragrant forest and inhaled the fresh air of heaven. By chance, or perhaps by habit, he walked the path he himself had trodden to the hill by the brook, his former trysting-place with Singoalla. The wind whispered in the spruces as before on the top of the hill, the brook murmured as of old, and the same flowers grew there as in other days. Erland sat down by the brink of the brook; a feeble recollection of something delightful, but now past, sported through the mist of his memory and filled his breast with delicious melancholy. He looked up, saw Helen at his side, and raised her hand to his lips.

The Poisoned Draught

But Bengt had now determined that Erland, when he was fairly restored to health, should leave home and go out into the world to recover his spirits and feel again the joys of life, and, in the school of war, develop himself as a man and a knight.

Nobody wished this more than Erland himself. He wanted, like the warriors of ancient days, to acquire name and fame through prowess. The passion of youth for adventure awoke. The summer was spent in making ready for the journey. Twenty men—tenants of the Knight—were equipped to accompany Erland. He chose them himself from among the stoutest youths of the neighbourhood, and he exercised them daily in arms in the castle-yard.

Autumn was drawing near when Erland said farewell, and richly furnished with weapons, horses, and money, departed with his little troop. The road to Kalmar was chosen, whence a sailing vessel was to carry the adventurers to Germany, where Erland intended to offer his services to the Emperor.

But before Erland left Ekö castle, he and Helen Ulf sax had plighted their troth.

Singoalla

When the billows of the sea danced round Erland's ship and carried him farther and farther from the shores of his native land, strange thoughts sometimes stirred in the youth's breast. The name of Singoalla echoed in his mind and confused it. He loathed and loved this name at the same time. In its sound lay love and sentiment, poison and sorcery. Sometimes brown eyes gleamed in his recollection, sometimes brown cheeks blushed, seeking, as it were, to challenge the image of the gentle Helen, Erland's betrothed, and trying, by their beauty, to outshine hers. Then Erland said:

“Away, unholy vision, from my soul!” and he whistled for a fair wind, took his stand at the helm, and steered his keel towards the south.

Part the Second.

I.

BENONI.

TEN years have gone and many changes have taken place during that time.

Riddar Erland Monesköld is now lord of Ekö castle; his wife is Helen Ulfsax, and she now carries a little Erland in her arms.

Bengt and the Lady Elfrida are sleeping their last long sleep. When Erland came back home from abroad, wearied of war, bloodshed, and empty glory, they were already reposing in their tomb beneath the altar of the monastery chapel.

But Father Henry was alive, and as he formerly visited Bengt, so he now visited Erland, and sat beside him of an evening in the banqueting-hall, conversing about the remarkable adventures the Knight had met with in foreign countries. Lady Helen listened and smiled at her little son; the

Singoalla

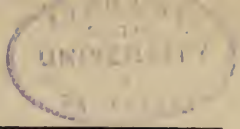
maidens listened too, where, farther away in the hall, they turned their distaffs.

Erland was happy with his wife, but his bliss was not unalloyed. Tell me, reader, where such can be found on earth? He had quenched the fire of his youth in the clash of battle. Manly gravity, at times changing into gloom, rested upon his brow. He had tried life and men, and now sought, in rest and oblivion, his earthly comfort by the fireside.

But in the depth of his soul dwelt a shade which sighed in darkness and strove to ascend to the light of thought and feeling. Yet the Knight cursed its sighing, and conjured it, as a bad spirit, to stay quiet in the depths—to chase it away altogether he was not able to do.

It was the image of Singoalla.

This shade followed him in battle and adventure, in joy and grief, in times of hope fulfilled and in times of disappointment. His remembrance of the brown girl was clearer to be sure, but still stood in a faint half-light, like that which broods over the heath when the moon rises blood-red above the horizon. It was always linked with recollections of meetings by night in the forest, of sacrilege,



Benoni

a poisoned draught, dagger-thrusts, sorcery, and heathendom. And yet he sometimes owned to himself that it was with a feeling of love that he clung to this image. Then it was that he did not like to look into Helen's eyes; but rode out into the forest, rode wildly till the horse was covered with foam, rode long until night brooded over the earth.

One summer's evening when the Knight, beset by his gloomy mood, rode in the forest, a thunder-storm came upon him, followed by heavy showers of rain. He sought shelter in the monastery, in whose neighbourhood he was. The Brother-janitor, now so bald with age that a tonsure was unneeded, opened the door, saluted the Knight, and told him that the Prior was in the library. The Knight entered and found his old teacher, with pen in hand, writing in the folio at which he had begun to work ten years ago. His was the untiring diligence which adds pebble to pebble until a mountain lifts its head, as time adds second to second till, as their number grows, it seems like eternity. The room had remained unaltered, dusky and solemn; the birch-trees dimmed

Singoalla

as of yore the green arched window, and the folios stood on their old shelves; nay, the very marker that the Father, ten years ago, during the last reading-hour, laid at "*Extremum hunc, Arethusa, mihi concede laborem,*" still remained in the old Virgil. But the pupil of bygone days was no longer a boy, but a man with earnest brow and pale, bearded cheeks.

Erland sat down by the Father's side. The storm which was raging outside, and the melancholy patter of the showers of rain beating against the window, gave their talk a weird tone. The two men conversed about the perishableness of human things, but whereas Erland only saw them shifting, fleeing, foaming, and vanishing in the river of time, the monk pointed towards heaven and reminded him of the everlasting; and when Erland said that he had nowhere found pure metal in man's heart, but that it always had in it some base alloy, the Father said, "Dust is dust, spirit is spirit, but even here in the dust, the spirit shall, nevertheless, be master. All things shall be subjected to spirit; heaven shall descend to the earth, and a new age dawn for man."

Benoni

“Do you believe that, reverend Father?” said Erland. “Then perhaps the master-builder is now walking over the earth and clearing the ground for the new building.”

“What do you mean?” asked the monk.

“I mean the Plague, the Black Death, which is now ravaging the world. I have told you before of the sights I saw in Germany, Italy, France, nay, wherever I steered my course. When I returned here, I left behind me a veritable graveyard. All the countries of the south were full of lamentation and the dead. Men died as corn falls before the sickle. Lübeck was the last town I saw in the Roman Empire, for from there I once more took ship for Kalmar, and in the streets of Lübeck lay nine thousand dead. I have heard men talk of towns where a hundred thousand had died within a few days. Is not this the master-builder now walking over the earth and clearing the ground for the new building? Will it not soon be our turn too?”

“*Miserere, Domine!* Lord, have mercy!” muttered the Father with clasped hands.

“Look,” continued the Knight, pointing towards

Singoalla

the window; "look at these drops falling against the window-panes and trickling down! Perhaps the clouds that have bred them have been driven here from the plague-smitten south, where they have drunk in the foul air bred by the dead that cover the earth; perhaps these clouds are the destroying angel's mantle fluttering over our heads; perhaps every one of these drops bears within its womb a seed for the destruction of the living. Who knows?"

"Lord, have mercy!" whispered the monk.

The darkness of the library was increased by the black clouds that sailed across the sky. Now and then a flash of lightning gleamed through the sky and threw a dazzling light into the room. It was as if a voice from heaven had borne witness to the truth of the Knight's dismal foreboding.

"I have heard it said," he went on to say, "that the coming of the Plague to a place is fore-shown by a vision. Early in the morning a boy is seen to enter the gate of the town with a rake in his hand. If he rake outside a house, many therein will die. Sometimes there is with him a girl carrying a broom, and if she sweep outside a

Benoni

house, all therein will die. But this, perhaps, is only an idle tale. It is certain, however, that most men believe the Day of Judgment is at hand, and therefore are bequeathing their wealth to churches and monasteries."

"You spoke truth: it is the master-builder clearing the ground for his new edifice. Erland, when I saw you come home and marked the white mantle with the red cross that covered your armour, I said to myself: 'Behold a soldier who has vowed his sword to the increase of the Faith, his body to mortification, his wealth to the Church, his all to God!' I thought that you had taken the vow of a holy order of knighthood, and that you were at once monk and warrior. I rejoiced thereat, for that was what I dreamed for you when you were a boy; that was what I wished you to seek of your own free will. True enough, all this is not fulfilled. You have fought against the Infidels in Lithuania, but you are a layman: you have a wife and son. Know, young knight, that a building is being set up with the earth for its foundation, with heaven for its roof. A new and mighty workman has set his hand to the work, and is pushing it on with

Singoalla

giant speed! This workman is, as you said, none other than the Plague, which is now ravaging the earth. Men, you said, too, bequeath their wealth to churches and monasteries. Thus is the building being raised stone by stone. Whosoever hath much, to him more shall be given. The evil spirit that is a very part of gold shall not be made Christian until it has been bound with the bonds of the Church. Then it will become an angel pouring blessings on the earth from his horn of plenty. All, all that is called earthly riches shall, penny by penny, be gathered into the bosom of the Church; and when all, yea, all is gathered there, where will be the power of earthly princes then? Where will be the rich who oppress the poor? where the distressed who call in vain for bread? where any power of spirit that shall not bear fruit in God's service? where a spark of genius that shall not be sought out from under the ashes and revived to a great light? where one infant's soul that shall not, with all its sleeping powers, be developed into a perfect human soul? When the Church possesses all, then all shall be in common, all men everywhere one brotherhood,

Benoni

united in love-feasts around Christ's table. Then there shall be none rich and none poor; then the millennium will have come. Ay, may it come! Amen! Erland, this is the end for which a league, extended throughout Christendom, yearns. The head of this league is our Holy Father in Rome, and I am one of its humblest members, with little strength, but with good will and good hope. . . .”

The storm continued. It was now dark, and the Father lit a lamp. Its dim light could not hide the white flashes of lightning that every now and then flickered over the black background of the window, shedding their light on the pale faces of the Knight and the monk.

“Follow me to the chapel . . . God's voice is heard in the storm . . . let us pray!” said the Father, rising. Erland followed him.

The monks were called to chapel. The tapers in the branched candlesticks were lit. Gathered round the altar the kneeling monks began a chant whose tones rang with feelings to which no heart is quite a stranger: man's fear of the supremacy and wrath of nature, and of her hidden life-making power, and unchecked lust of destroying, and also

Singoalla

the trust of man in a merciful Being whose love is present even in destruction.

The sound of the hallowed bells chimed in with the chant of the monks; but higher and more mighty was the rumbling of the thunder, and the roaring of the storm.

When the prayer was ended, the Father and the Knight returned to the library. The bells were still tolling; they were to ring as long as the storm continued, thus exhorting the neighbouring people to prayer.

The Knight now wished to return home, and was just about to mount his horse, which had been left in Brother John's charge; but at that very moment the brother entered and announced that a boy of strange and outlandish appearance wished to speak with the Prior.

"Whence does he come in this foul weather?" asked the Prior in astonishment.

"I know not."

The Prior and also the Knight instantly thought of the vision that was believed to foretell the Plague.

The boy was brought into the library and looked



Benoni.



THE
LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

Benoni

at with wonder by the monk and the Knight. He was small and delicate, and about nine years old. Rain was dripping from his long, dark locks, but a cloak which he had taken off outside in the archway had protected his brown suit from the rain. His features were beautiful, but of a stamp that one would hardly have expected in a child; for there was set so deep an earnestness on his forehead, such gloomy knowledge and mysterious splendour in his eyes, so much mute and patient suffering on his pale cheeks, in the lines around his little mouth, and in the delicate veins outlined on his big eyelids, that they formed not a natural but rather a supernatural harmony in his childish face. His dress, as we have said before, was brown and of coarse stuff, but of a cut that showed it had been made by a mother, proud of the beauty of her child.

Was he the Plague-boy? No, he did not carry the weird rake. . . . It was no phantom, but a little creature with human blood in its veins!

“Who are you?” asked the Father, turning the light of the lamp on the stranger.

Singoalla

“My name is Benoni.”

“Have you wandered far in this awful storm, poor child?”

“Yes.”

“Whence do you come?”

“From afar.”

“Benoni! A strange name! Yet it is known in Holy Scripture.¹ Are you alone?”

“Yes.”

“Are you a Christian?” asked Erland quickly.

The boy again answered “Yes.”

“Can you pronounce the names of God and Christ?” asked the Prior for greater surety.

“God and Christ,” repeated the boy, bowing his head and making the sign of the cross.

“Well,” continued the Prior, more at ease, “tell me now what your errand is, and give me also a fuller account of the reason of your wandering; how you chanced to come here, and who are your father and mother. After that you shall be taken to the monastery kitchen, eat your fill, and shall have a bed to rest in, for I doubt not you are tired and hungry.”

¹ Genesis xxxv. 18: *Ben-oni*—that is, the son of my sorrow.—TR.

Benoni

While the Prior was speaking, a flash of lightning shone into the room, and the thunder rumbled so vehemently over their heads that the Father and the Knight crossed themselves and said, "*Miserere!*" But Benoni stood calm, with his eyes fixed on the floor.

"Come here," said the Knight to the boy, "and let me look at you more closely."

Benoni walked up and looked into the Knight's eyes.

Erland put his hand on the boy's head and sighed deeply—he did not know why. He could not take his eyes off the boy's features; they reminded him of something in the past. And while he was thus gazing at the face of the little wanderer, the shadow which dwelt in the depth of his being again began to sigh, stir, and try to force its way up into the brighter regions of his soul that were illuminated by memory. Then the Knight with unthinking vehemence seized the little one's arm, in doubt whether to clasp him to his heart or fling him away with all his force. But the boy gave the Knight a look as if he would say, "Let go my arm! You are hurting me."

Singoalla

What the Prior sought to know he got only by many repeated questions. This is what he learned :

Benoni had wandered far, through large forests, through many towns, and crossed vast waters. What the names of these forests, towns, and waters were he did not know, for he gave no thought to names, and he had forgotten those he had heard. He had not been alone in his wanderings. He had had companions, but as to whom they were he said little. When the Father asked him about this, he was silent, as if he did not understand the question, and when the Father repeated it he was silent again.

With regard to the object of his wandering, Benoni gave the following account, which astonished his hearers in no small degree :

“It has been revealed to my mother that there was a monastery in this neighbourhood which had once, in years gone by, been plundered by the heathen. It was likewise revealed to my mother that the stolen treasures would be found again by me if she were willing to undertake with me a pilgrimage to the distant monastery, and if a knight

Benoni

who is lord of the surrounding neighbourhood were willing to take me for his only henchman, and if I were willing to serve him for a hundred days and sleep on the mat by his door. My mother said that doing this would be a work pleasing to God ; and moreover that she had been unfortunate, and that God would perhaps restore her to happiness if this revelation were accomplished. She also said that we ought to do this for the sake of my father's soul, for my father had sinned much in not fulfilling a sacred promise. Moreover, my mother was glad to have had this revelation, and did not delay setting out on her journey, taking me with her. I had also another companion, but now I am alone. Is this the monastery to which I am sent? Has this monastery been visited by heathen? Does any knight called Erland live in this neighbourhood, for I have been told that such is his name?"

"The God who has protected you on your long journey, tender pilgrim, has also guided your steps aright," said the Father, looking with reverence at Benoni. "Well, this monastery was plundered ten years ago by heathen; and the knight you seek is

Singoalla

sitting here. This man is Riddar Erland Bengtson Monesköld. It seems as if God is minded to perform a miracle in our days. The issue will show. Not seldom, however, one hears talk of visions and revelations as marvellous. Did your mother receive this revelation awake or dreaming, young Benoni?"

But Benoni did not reply, for all his mind was turned to the Knight. The boy shook his head and said to himself:

"No, he does not look as my mother said— young, handsome, and beardless."

"What do your eyes want?" asked the Knight, who had sat silent with his brow buried in his hand. His voice was stern when he put the question.

"Are you Riddar Erland?" asked Benoni.

"Yes. . . . And you, vagabond, who is your father, and who is your mother? You have said much, but nothing of this. Your speech has been long and slippery as an eel. It has run on, leaving nought to lay hold of. Who are you? Of all you have said I know nothing."

But Father Henry began in chosen words to

Benoni

show the Knight that this was not the right way to treat so young and unprotected a pilgrim, and one who had come on so wonderful an errand. Not only for the pilgrim's own sake, not only for his father's and mother's sake, nor only for the sake of the monastery, but chiefly to see if God meant to work a miracle, it was Erland's duty to receive the pilgrim into his house and let him sleep on his mat. If delusion or deceit was at work, it would, without doubt, soon be revealed, if not before, then at the end of the hundred days.

The monk added that Benoni should rest that night in the monastery; but that, if the Knight were willing to take him as his servant for the time proposed, the pious mission that the child was thus to perform should on the following morning be consecrated by a solemn Mass in the monastery chapel, at which the Knight and Lady Helen were desired to assist.

"Well," replied the Knight, "so be it." And he kept on whispering, "If I had not heard this boy utter the names of God and Christ, I should take him to be an evil spirit, an awful fiendish cheat from the abyss of Hell. Look at his eyes! Are

Singoalla

they the eyes of a child? Does not misfortune speak from out of their dark depths? I charge you, reverend Father, sprinkle this child to-morrow plenteously with holy water!"

"To me his face is comely, nor do I see evil lurking in his eyes," replied the Prior.

"I was thinking of the Plague-boy," muttered the Knight; "God forbid this boy bring evil into my house!"

"What a thought!"

The Knight turned over the leaves of the manuscript lying before him without thought, buried his head in both his hands, but lifted it and looked with a glance of surprise and suspicion, almost timid, towards the door, for he heard something therefrom: a child's voice half whispering, half singing, accompanied by sounds of a clear, piercing, and ethereal ring.

"What is that? Is it he? Does he dare to sing in our presence? And when it is thundering! Have mercy, O Lord! What a flash!"

The Knight was about to rise. His eyes were turned menacingly on the boy; but the Father put his hand on his arm to check him. Even the

Benoni

Father was astonished when he heard Benoni singing, and saw him kneeling down and tapping with his fingers pieces of glass which he had taken from out his clothes and put on the floor. It is true that children often quickly change from earnestness to play and from play to earnestness, but at this moment, and among such surroundings, it was indeed wonderful. The Knight turned his face towards the monk and said :

“My old teacher, I am ashamed when I say it, and I do not understand it, but this child, if child it be at all, confounds me, frightens me, calls up ugly memories and fancies. You hear him singing? Believe me, it is a song of witchcraft. Hear what I have to tell. I heard in my boyhood a vagabond—an old man it was then, instead of a boy—sing an incantation which made me half mad with a desire to rush into crowds of men and smite and kill and be killed. He sang of Satan, whom he called Odin, at the head of the ancient Swedes and Goths, our ill-starred heathen ancestors, inciting them to fight, maybe, against the soldiers of Christ. He sang of showers of arrows pouring down over forests of spears, he sang of a sea of

Singoalla

weapons rolling in howling billows, lashed by the storm of Valkyrs and glittering in the lightning flashes of swords. I saw, yes, I saw, Satan on the eight-footed horse of Hell. Grey clouds and blue tatters of sky fluttered from his shoulders. I heard his shouts right amidst the horns of battle, dinning like the last trumpet. The mere memory of all this pierces my very marrow and bones. I was enchanted, bewitched, beside myself. Wandering singers are a dangerous race. It is well they have now nearly died out. This boy is of their blood. Silence him!"

Benoni's song was melancholy, and only consisted of a few notes, which formed an even, lonesome, and strange melody. If the Knight and the Father had chosen to listen to Benoni's song when the thunder was silent, they would have heard the following words, sung to the ringing of the pieces of glass, the purling of the rain outside, and the peal of the bells from the tower :

Down sinks the sun, low'r frowning the clouds with ominous
menace.

Foaming the lake rolls, and rustling the woods 'neath
vagabond scud.

Benoni

Cranes are crying on dreary crags;
Sheltered by rocks the falcon dwells,
Wearied of hunting he hideth
His beak in his shower-soak'd wings.

Sunk has the sun, and darkness grows deeper 'neath pine-
tree and fir.

Rattles the rain! Ever murmurs the rillet through heather
and moss.

In grief the clouds their tears outpour—
The son rests on his mother's lap—
The clouds' son and his mother sad—
In tears they long to melt away!

Thus sang Benoni, but before he had finished, the Knight arose, went up to him, and trampled his glass into fragments.

“Do you not hear the thunder?” he said, roughly seizing the boy by the arm. “Will you mock God's voice in the storm? Where learned you manners? Should not even the pious cross themselves and bow their heads before the lightning? Are you a heathen?”

Benoni first looked at his broken instrument and then at the Knight.

“May I serve you for one hundred days or

Singoalla

not?" he asked, as if he had not understood the Knight's anger.

The Knight let go the boy's arm, for he could hardly bear his glance, and replied :

"You may come, for I wish to know who you are. But these hundred days shall be no days of feasting and merriment, I warn you! You may sleep on my mat, but you shall be my dog and paid with kicks. And if the treasures plundered from the monastery be not recovered by you, as you feign has been revealed to your mother they shall be, then look for worse to come!"

Benoni showed no sign of fear, but seemingly rejoiced in the promise, and something of gladness glistened in his dark eyes.

The Knight then bade the Prior good night. The heart of the holy Father grieved over such harshness towards the little pilgrim, but he tried to lighten it by showing him more kindness. When the Knight had gone, the Prior took Benoni, not to the monastery kitchen, but to the monks' table in the refectory, seated him at supper between himself and the oldest monk in the monas-

Benoni

tery, and spoke to the monks of the latter's pilgrimage and strange errand.

When they had heard all, the brethren paid Benoni greater reverence than elderly men are wont to show to boys, and when the meal was over, a bed was made for Benoni in the library. Here he was left alone after the Prior had bidden him good night, blessed him, and returned to his cell.

II.

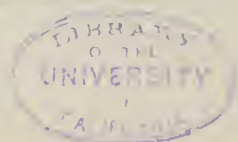
THE KNIGHT AND THE PILGRIM.

EARLY on the following morning, they celebrated in the chapel the Mass by which Father Henry had determined to consecrate Benoni's holy errand to the house of Erland.

The thunder of the past night had purified the air, and the morning was beautiful. Lady Helen walked to the monastery, leaning on Erland's arm, followed by all the serving-men and maids of the castle. The Knight had told his wife about his meeting with Benoni, the boy's errand, and his own promise to receive him. Against this promise Lady Helen had nought to say, as it concerned a pious work, through which God's power might be revealed by a miracle. Nay, she greatly desired to see this young pilgrim, and rejoiced much that it was in her own house that the revelation had charged him to serve and do penance. So when Lady Helen entered the chapel and the solemn



Consecration of Benoni's Pious Mission.



The Knight and the Pilgrim

chant of the monks fell upon her ears, when amongst their bent figures she discovered the little pilgrim-boy, dressed in a white vestment, and looking more beautiful than any of the cherubs adorning the sanctuary walls, she fell upon her knees—an example followed by the Knight and all his people—and in a hymn of St. Ambrose, sung by awed voices, and filling the church with its solemn sweetness, she mingled her prayers with those of the monks that the good work might not fail :

*“O Rex, æterne Domine,
Rerum creator omnium,
Qui eras ante sæcula
Semper cum Patre Filius . . .”*

The censers swung and their incense veiled the choir in light mist; the pilgrim knelt at the altar rails and received benediction. Then the Prior took hold of his hand and led him to the Knight, and Lady Helen received him with kind words. But the Knight said nothing, though he watched sharply that Benoni, like the others, got his full share of the holy-water as they left the chapel. After putting on his every-day clothes

Singoalla

again, Benoni—a wonder to curious people—followed his new master and mistress to the castle.

On their way there, it so happened that a shaggy dog, with the slow, stiff stride of age, came out of the forest, joined Benoni, and licked his hand; then he sniffed at the Knight, gave a howl, and tried to jump into his arms. The Knight repulsed the dog with a kick, but on looking at the beast more closely, stopped and exclaimed:

“My old Käck! What, are you alive still! Whence do you come?”

Erland patted the dog, and his wonder at this unexpected meeting was unbounded, for Käck had been lost ten years, and the Knight believed the strange people had stolen him, or that he had been devoured by wolves.

Yet the Knight did not rejoice at seeing his dog again, but was thereby filled with gloomy thoughts and dark foreboding, blended with memories of the past, from which he would fain have been free. But Käck followed faithfully the Knight's footsteps to the castle, and was welcomed there by the old henchmen and servants, to whom his

The Knight and the Pilgrim

unexpected return was a matter for much wonder, and, in spite of the ill-will of the younger generation of dogs, took possession of his old kennel in the castle-yard.

Now must be told how Benoni spent his days at the castle of Ekö.

Erland agreed unwillingly to what Benoni's mission asked. Lady Helen set apart for her husband a room in the tower to serve for his bed-chamber, and she exhorted him kindly but urgently to let none but Benoni serve him, however bad this service might be performed; for so, as has been told, the revelation demanded. Hence, care was taken that only Benoni should be allowed to fill Erland's goblet and do his bidding. But the Knight was loath to receive his goblet from the little penitent's hand. Nay, on the first two days his lips did not even touch its rim. Dark looks, hard words fell to the boy's share abundantly; and sometimes it happened that the Knight lifted his hand to strike him; but then Benoni stood as he was wont—motionless and silent, with downcast eyes, and the Knight thrust back his wrath. Least of all could the Knight endure his eyes. Benoni

Singoalla

knew this, and seldom looked him in the face. To avoid this page thus strangely forced upon him, the Knight kept in the woods and fields more than his custom was, and went hunting and fishing, visited his tenants, and overlooked their work in field and meadow. Then Benoni had his hours free, and he spent them in rambling about the forest, often with Käck at his side, or in sitting alone in some lonely garret of the tower, where a window that had been broken by the wind gave him the material for a new instrument. And to it he sang strange and melancholy ditties, moved by something within him. No one disturbed Benoni at these times, for it was thought that in solitude he waited for the revelation to find the stolen treasures of the monastery. But at night Benoni lay on the mat by Erland's door, and the Knight heard uneasily, through sleepless hours, the sighs that broke from the boy's bosom.

In the evenings, when the Knight was sitting in the hall with his wife, Benoni's place was in a corner apart. Lady Helen often spoke kindly to the boy; but his face never brightened. Still he understood her kindness: that she saw by his

The Knight and the Pilgrim

eyes. But when the Knight, as often happened, embraced little Erland, his son, and let him ride on his knee, or caressed and kissed him, Benoni would keep back his sobs but not his tears. Tears cannot be heard, and the corner where he sat was dark.

Thus the time passed until the tenth day of Benoni's stay at Ekö. The Knight had rowed out on the lake to fish; Benoni had gone to the forest. When the Knight returned from fishing, and had sat to dine, Benoni was not at hand. His place was behind the Knight's chair, for he waited upon his master at meals.

"A watchful servant and a zealous penitent, this Benoni!" said the Knight. "Woe to his poor father's soul unless works of supererogation other than his son's can release it from Purgatory!"

But scarcely had the Knight pronounced these words when Benoni entered.

"Come here," cried the Knight, whose anger was aroused, for what reason it is difficult to say. "If you are my servant, you ought to see to your work better, you elf!"

And with that, the Knight struck Benoni

Singoalla

so sharp a blow on the face that he fell to the floor.

Lady Helen gave her harsh husband a reproachful look for his cruelty; but Benoni got up, dashed away the shining tears from his eyes, and took from his doublet a glittering diadem, and with glowing cheeks handed it to the Knight.

It was the golden crown from the statue of the Virgin, ten years ago carried away from the monastery by the wanderers. The Knight recognised it with amazement; Lady Helen seized the crown and burst into a cry of joy. Little Erland, who was sitting beside his father, stretched out his hands for it, for its lustre pleased his eyes.

“Where did you find the crown?” asked the Knight.

“In the forest,” replied Benoni.

“Have you found all?”

“No; but in ten days I shall find more, and when a hundred days have elapsed, I shall have found all, so my mother has said.”

The Knight was silent, and continued his meal. But Lady Helen seized Benoni's arm, laid her cheek to his, and said half to herself:

The Knight and the Pilgrim

“ Little pilgrim, forgive Sir Erland! He does not mean any harm, but he has a hasty temper.”

At these words Benoni burst into tears, and little Erland began to cry. Children’s feelings are stirred by those about them, and he liked Benoni, for he sometimes played with the child, and showed great forbearance to his whims.

Then the Knight rose, flung his chair to the floor, left the hall, and went to his chamber in the tower.

Benoni followed him, for so his service demanded. But he found the door of the tower-chamber locked; the Knight wanted to be alone. Then Benoni sat down at the door and waited long hours. But the Knight did not come forth till towards evening; then went to the hall, spoke but little with Lady Helen, ate his supper, and returned to his bedroom, followed by Benoni, whose duty, as we know, required him to do so.

The daylight entered the dim and narrow window sparingly. The Knight silently examined an old sword. All was so quiet that the running of the sand in the hour-glass was heard like a gentle voice, whispering of consolation and death.

Singoalla

“Fill my goblet!” said the Knight at last.

Benoni poured some wine into the cup, and with trembling hands and lowered eyes handed it to his master.

“That is good,” said the Knight, putting the cup on the table.

Erland went to rest. Benoni lay down on his mat. Then he noticed that his couch was softer than usual, and found a quilt hidden under the mat. Wondering who had done this, for none other than the Knight and himself had been in the chamber, he dragged away the quilt, for a hard bed was part of his purpose.

The Knight saw this, but said nothing.

A little time passed, and only the sand-glass was heard in the tower-chamber. Then said the Knight:

“Benoni, move my pillow a little.”

Benoni got up, did as he was bid, and returned to his mat.

“Now I am comfortable,” said the Knight.

Half-an-hour passed, and Benoni thought the Knight was asleep, and so he eased his heart of a sigh, certain that it would not be heard by the

The Knight and the Pilgrim

sleeper. But he started as the Knight's voice asked a little while afterwards :

“Benoni, are you asleep?”

“No.”

Silence reigned in the room. An hour passed. The untiring sand-glass whispered, as ever, of consolation and death. Benoni listened to the whisper and fancied he understood it. Then the Knight's voice was heard again :

“Benoni, are you asleep?”

This question sounded so gentle that it echoed in Benoni's soul.

“No,” replied he, biting his coverlet to stifle a sigh.

“Benoni, why do you not sleep? Children are wont to sleep at night! Are you unhappy, Benoni? I have been hard with you, and have ill-used you. Poor little pilgrim, alone in the world but loved by God. Will you forgive me?”

Benoni answered with sobs.

“Sleep now! Happy be your dreams, poor child!” said the Knight.

III.

THE CAVE.

IT pleased Lady Helen not a little to see the quick change that had taken place in Erland's feeling towards Benoni. Patience and gentleness conquer wrath, thought Lady Helen; and, moreover, that Benoni had found the golden crown, and that hence the revelation was true, in some measure turned the Knight to gentler behaviour. So at least thought Lady Helen.

Ever since the eleventh day of the boy's stay in the castle, Erland had shown him kindness. This so wrought on Benoni that his demeanour grew more easy and natural. Even in the Knight's presence he played on bits of glass and sang, caring not if any one heard him. He felt no bitterness now, such as had extorted his silent tears when the Knight petted his son. He looked Erland in the eyes untroubled when presenting his cup. But

The Cave

daily he visited the forest in hours when the Knight had no need of his service, and Käck nearly always was with him.

On the twelfth day it happened that Father Henry went to the castle to see the little pilgrim, whom he loved dearly, and regarded with a greater reverence since the crown, so miraculously found, had graced again the statue of the Holy Virgin in the monastery; and to communicate to the Knight the contents of a letter which had arrived from a convent near the Norwegian border.

When the Father arrived, he learned that Benoni had been long absent in the forest, but that the Knight had just returned, and so he went to his room to talk with him.

The Father's countenance, although it was wont to be calm and cheerful, bore too clear witness of trouble and uneasiness. The two men met in the tower-chamber.

“Bad news,” said the Father, laying the letter on the table, and sitting down heavily in an easy-chair. “This parchment has been sent to me from my brother, Benedict, Prior of Gudtorp, a monastery near the border of Norway.”

Singoalla

“Well?” asked the Knight.

“You prophesied truly . . . I feared it. . . .
Read! It is approaching us with great strides,
the day of God’s wrath, *dies iræ, dies illa*. . .
The Plague is in the country, and spreading rapidly.
Lord, have mercy upon us! What marvel if the
strongest heart now begins to quake!”

Erland’s pale cheeks turned paler. He seized
the parchment, and his eyes fell on these lines:

“This ghastly murderer, they say, came to the
Norwegian town of Bergen in a disabled English
ship, the crew of which were dead when she
drifted into the roadstead. He spares neither high
nor low, clerk nor layman, rich nor poor. At
Nidaros,¹ the Archbishop Arne, with his whole
Chapter, has been slain by him. He has
wandered from valley to valley and swept away
all living things—men and cattle, wild beasts, and
the very birds beneath the sky. Now he is here.
Parce, parce, cohibe flagellum, Domine Deus! My
priors is wiped out. I alone am left. The bodies
of my brethren are rotting outside the monastery
gate, and I am not able to bury them. I see

¹ The old name of Drontheim.

The Cave

through my window what is left of my people, walking in procession round the church, imploring God's mercy. While the procession advances its ranks are thinning, and the crowd of dying and dead who lie thereabout is increasing. For myself, I look always upon my body, expecting to perceive thereon the black forerunners of disease and death. I know I shall die. God have mercy on my soul! A man who thinks he will save his life if he quit this kingdom of death will bring this letter. May it reach your hands! *Pax tecum!*"

"God be gracious unto us!" said the Knight in a deep voice. "The letter is already old. Perhaps the great slayer is near us even now. It is hard to have wife and children in times like this."

"Love nothing earthly," said the Father; "and the gate of death has no terrors."


"I have seen the Plague near enough," continued the Knight. "I have wandered in southern towns among heaps of dead, carried the sick on my back, felt their breath mingle with mine, and I still live."

Singoalla

“Our fate is in God’s hand. . . .” With this thought the Father put away from his soul the horror with which the evil news had at first struck him, and breathed freely again.

“You are right, our fate is in God’s hand. Reverend Father, were my page Benoni here, we might cheer our hearts with a cup of good wine. He will, however, soon come, as he never fails to do his duty well.”

And the Knight looked out of the window. His heart, which had fought hard with itself, had now utterly abandoned itself to such affection for Benoni that it longed for him every moment he was away. This feeling was mysterious and inexplicable. From Benoni’s eyes shone Benoni’s own soul. And, at first with awe, he saw in them a likeness to those of Singoalla, and remembered her as a heathen, and the evil done to his body by the poisoned draught, and to his soul by tales of sorcery, treachery, sacrilege, and murder; remembered the heathen oath he had broken, and the curse that should reach him if he broke it. Then the thought of Benoni seemed to hallow these memories, and it seemed as if kindness to



The Cave

him might atone for the wrong he had done unwillingly to Singoalla.

But let us leave the Knight and follow Benoni in the forest. He sped so quickly amongst the pine-trees, which fringed the shores of the lake, that his pale cheeks were reddened by the exercise. At last he reached a steep pile of rocks, split and torn ages and ages ago from their hill, and propped and heaped together in huge confusion.

Benoni made his way through this maze of rocks, climbed up and down, and at last stood in a cave where a dim light found its way between slabs of rock flung like a roof over leaning blocks of granite. Käck had followed the boy on his way, where it led half hidden among brushwood and thickets.

The cave was inhabited. A couch of moss, covered with skins of the beasts of the forest, lay along the uneven walls. A flat stone in the middle of the cave did duty for a table. On the ground lay a bow, a bundle of arrows, and a sword, and near them charred boughs on a heap of embers and ashes.

Two figures were sitting within the twilight

Singoalla

when Benoni and Käck arrived. One was a man, lean and swarthy, whose hollow eyes peered dimly through the gloom. The other was a woman, dark and lean like the man. Both were silent and stared straight before them. Unspeakable suffering was stamped on every feature of this woman, the weariness of pain had left its mark on her form. But her beauty still shone dimly through a fixed sorrow, beauty saddened by a hint of decay.

“Benoni is come,” said the man, for the woman had not heard the sound of the boy’s footsteps, nor seen even that Käck had lain down on the moss couch beside her, and yawned and stretched himself as if at home.

The woman started and looked up. Benoni had twined his arms round her neck, kissed her mouth, eyes, and forehead, and pressed his cheek to hers, saying :

“Dear mother, I bring you good news.”

Singoalla — for it was she — answered with brightened face :

“Good news? Can you give me a ray of sunlight, son of a cruel father? Child of sorrow, my



The Cave.



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The Cave

darling, give him back to me, and may he never leave me again!"

Singoalla seized Benoni's hand and passed it across her forehead.

"My father hates me no longer," said Benoni. This was the good news he brought.

"Assim!" cried Singoalla to the dark man; "do you hear? Erland no longer hates Singoalla's son and his."

"I hear," replied the man dully; "thus the power can work. Let it work soon!"

"Hates you no longer," repeated Singoalla with unbounded delight. "Has he called you son—has he any suspicion that you are his son? Does he not say sometimes that you are like Singoalla? Has he never named me to you? Surely he has."

"No."

Singoalla laid her hand on her forehead.

"No," she said in a lower voice, "I might know that. . . . Benoni, is Lady Helen very beautiful? Does the Knight often caress his wife? Does he love her much?"

"Yes," replied Benoni. Singoalla turned away her face and hid it against the cold rock.

Singoalla

“Let the power work!” Assim’s voice was heard to say.

“Do not be sad, mother,” implored Benoni, caressing Singoalla till she turned her face towards him.

“Ay,” exclaimed Singoalla, rising. “The power shall work. Benoni, you shall bring your father to me.”

“If God give me strength.”

“You have it,” replied the mother; “you have the strength which Alako grants to his chosen ones. You can do great things with the power. You are a son of the warm South and the cold North. You are the son of troth and treachery, of heathen and Christian, of light and darkness, of youth’s first love and strength. Poor Benoni! Why are you here? You are a knight’s son, and a castle should be your dwelling-place, velvet your dress, and gold spurs ring on your heels. But you were born to sorrow, not to joy. The lines of your hand, the arch of your forehead, the net-work of the veins of your eyelids foredoom you to woe and sighing. Your cheek is pale like a flower that grows in shade. In sorrow you were born, a sighing breast nourished

The Cave

you. Your mother's kiss was salt with tears. Benoni, you shall bring your father to me. He has sworn me fidelity on Alako's image; he is mine. I have a right to shed his blood, to shut him out from heaven if his God and yours is my God. You shall bring him to me this very night, Benoni. He shall be made to answer for his faithlessness and cruelty. Oh, if he has a heart, he will weep over your pale cheeks and shudder at the agony of your poor mother."

"I will bring my father to you, but Assim must not kill him," said Benoni.

"As your mother commands," said Assim dryly, giving a kick to the sword which lay on the ground. "I have promised to be your mother's slave, though to her my fidelity is less than the perfidy of your father."

"Hush!" cried Benoni to Assim; "if you are my mother's slave, you should keep silence."

"I am the son of a prince, and her slave."

"I leave you, mother; the Knight is waiting for me. To-night I shall come back with my father."

"See," said Assim, "on that large flat stone

Singoalla

there are seeds that I have gathered at full-moon. Put them into the Knight's cup, and he will more easily obey you."

Benoni hesitated.

"Take them," said Singoalla; "the seeds Assim gathers are not all poisonous."

At these words Assim cast down his eyes. Benoni picked up the seeds Assim had gathered.

"Mother," said Benoni anxiously, "one word more! Have you had a revelation of where I am to find more of the buried treasures of the monastery?"

"I have had a new revelation, and after a week I will show you the place where you will find the Mass cup."

Singoalla kissed Benoni. The boy called Kâck, who was nearly asleep, left the cave, and hurried through the forest to the castle.

When he was gone, Singoalla said to Assim:

"Up, take the spade and the Mass cup! Bury it under the loose tree-root that I showed you where the brook falls into the lake. Benoni's soul must not be defiled by a lie."

Assim rolled away a stone from over a hole in

The Cave

which lay the stolen treasures of the monastery. He took out the Mass cup, let the rest remain, moved back the stone over the hole, seized a spade, and departed.

With these stolen treasures Assim had abandoned his people, after being for some time their chief, when Singoalla's father had fallen in a fight with the people of the sea-coast of Jutland. During this time Singoalla had followed Assim, and people thought they were man and wife. But it was not so, for Assim's love was scorned by Singoalla, and he was her slave.

But Benoni believed it was by a revelation from God that the holy crown had been found again in the forest.

IV.

THE SECRET POWER.

BENONI returned to the castle while the Prior and the Knight were still sitting in gloomy conversation at the table in the tower-chamber. Benoni filled their cups, and the Prior emptied his boldly, because it was presented to him by a pious pilgrim.

After the meal the Prior returned to the monastery. Neither he nor the Knight had spoken to Lady Helen or the lackeys and servants about the dismal tidings that had come from Norway, for they had no wish to frighten any one needlessly.

Erland, followed by Benoni, went to the tower-chamber to enjoy his night's rest. Benoni's heart trembled, for he had mixed Assim's magic seeds in the Knight's drink; trembled because Singoalla and Assim had told him that by his hidden power he must bring his father to his mother that night. This power is known now, but its



The Secret Power.



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The Secret Power

mystery is not yet unveiled. Men of science can track a nerve to its end with the microscope, and know how the earth moves along her path through space, or how a drop of water moves in a capillary tube, but they have not yet found the secret of this power. But the Brahmins of India and the people of Assaria knew it and used it before Mesmer stumbled upon it. The people of Assaria, unquestioning, left it as they found it—a mystery.

In Benoni this power was strong; his mother had discovered that. When her heart was rent by agonies and sleep fled from her, Benoni used to pass his hands over her face, and sleep came, and her heart was rocked to rest for a while.

The Knight was now asleep, as his breathing told. The hour-glass whispered, the stars peeped through the tower-window. Benoni rose from his mat and stole with noiseless steps to Erland's bed. The lad's heart beat violently. His hands were lifted hesitatingly; they glided like shadows over the Knight's forehead down to his breast. The hour-glass kept up its whisper, the stars twinkled. All was still; even the Knight's breathing ceased. He slept like a dead

Singoalla

man, and the starlight quivered on his pale forehead. Like shadows Benoni's hands glided over the Knight's face, then the Knight arose and Benoni shrunk back, and with a half-stifled cry threw himself on his knees. The Knight's eyes were shut.

"Sir," whispered Benoni, "I work you no harm. Do not be angry!"

The Knight made no reply.

Then Benoni perceived that the power had worked. He rose and said calmly:

"Knight, leave your bed and follow me."

"Whither will you lead me, Benoni?"

"You shall learn."

The Knight put on his clothes. Benoni took hold of his hand.

They descended the tower stairs and came, by a postern, to where the Knight's fishing-boats were lying. Benoni rowed him across the sound in the smallest of the boats with strokes so noiseless that the watchman did not hear them. Then he took hold of the Knight's hand and led him into the forest.

The hidden power so worked that the Knight's

The Secret Power

will, however strong and inflexible otherwise, bent itself to the boy's, and became one with it. The Knight's soul looked into Benoni's just as the faithful servant sees by his master's eyes what he wishes, thinks, and feels. Soon the secret power was to work still deeper. As, in the growing tree, each year a ring grows round its heart and dries up as new ones settle round it, so man's life is yearly ringed about with passions, feelings, and thoughts which in turn grow old and dry, as new passions, feelings, and thoughts settle round them. And the oldest rings of the soul lie nearest her heart, and that is why the recollections of childhood are so sweet: they are nearest the heart of the soul. So, while the boy was leading Erland through trees of the forest, the secret power struck deeper and deeper into his being through the dry enfolding years. And as it struck, withered and forgotten passions bloomed again and swelled with sap from the root of memory. Erland was again the man he had been ten years ago, when he gathered flowers with the brown girl by the borders of the brook. The shadow that had dwelt deep down in his soul rose up into brightest light and

Singoalla

feeling. The thrill of youthful love, sweetest of all passions, and which never returns, quivered through his being, and he thought and felt "Singoalla."

"Benoni," said the Knight when they had come some little way into the forest, "let us sit down and rest. The night is beautiful. Do you see the star that glistens up there over the top of the oak? I love you as a son, as if you were my little Erland; nay, I love you more, pale child, and I see that you love me from your soul. The night is so beautiful and fresh. Where are you leading me, Benoni? I will follow you to the end of the world."

"I am leading you to my mother."

"Does your mother live in the forest?"

"Yes."

"Oh that you were my son! Are you not my son?"

"I am your son," replied Benoni, touched, dazed, and bewildered by these sweet words.

"Who is your mother? Is she Singoalla . . . Singoalla . . . Singoalla?"

The ring in his voice grew softer and softer.

"Yes, my mother is Singoalla."

"Oh, God!" said the Knight, and tears trickled

The Secret Power

from his half-closed eyes, "I am so happy. Dear son, why did I not know you at once? You have been a stranger in your father's house, you have suffered greatly from his unkind wrath. But I see in your soul that you do not hate me. No, you love me, and are glad at my words. Come, Benoni, I will go to your mother."

And they walked on. Benoni trembled in the darkness—trembled with joy, as sometimes happens when happiness comes like a flood of sunlight pouring into blind eyes which have suddenly been opened,—trembled, too, with sadness, for the Knight was so pale, so changed, and his voice so ghostly. It was like a dream, as if a strange soul had spoken through his mouth.

They stopped before the pile of rocks. Benoni took hold of his father's hand and led him into the labyrinth. The light of a fire shone and disappeared, hidden by rocks, and reappeared. It came from the cave.

"How I tremble!" muttered the Knight; "does the beloved one of my soul live among these rocks?"

The noise of the steps of the Knight and the

Singoalla

pilgrim announced their arrival to the inmates of the lonely habitation. Singoalla was seated on the moss-couch, the firelight flickered on the damp walls of rock, and touched her cheeks with a show of colour. Assim sat in his old place with folded arms. He had just whetted his sword on a ledge of rock. It now hung naked in his belt.

“Listen,” whispered Singoalla, who, ever since twilight, had been listening and waiting, waiting and listening; “hearken! They are coming. Assim, go now!” Assim arose.

“I will stay in the shadow,” he said. “If you wish him to die, stir the fire for signal. My sword is sharp, my hand sure, and this bear of the north will fall and not know who struck him.”

“Go, go!” whispered Singoalla. Assim disappeared.

The next moment the Knight and Benoni entered. Singoalla stood before Erland. She looked at him. . . . Who can describe that look? A life with all its fortune, delight, and sorrow, with all its rich treasure of passion and feeling, may be concentrated in a look, as a lens gathers and

The Secret Power

focuses the beams of the sun. Past, present, and future may be blended in one look. They were blended in that of Singoalla into one question—proud and crushing and tremulous.

It asked of memory and forgetfulness, of love and hate, of tears and blood. The Knight felt his eyelids drop and burn as her eyes questioned him thus.

“Singoalla!” uttered Erland.

The tone in his voice answered all that Singoalla’s soul had asked. He came with remembrance, love, and entreaty for forgiveness. How, then, could she crush him with taunts of perjury, revenge, and death? Singoalla’s head sank on her bosom, and her gloomy brow was hidden in her thin, worn hands.

“Singoalla,” repeated Erland, and tears welled from beneath his eyelashes.

Singoalla made no reply. She stood like a pale statue; her bosom and its sighs alone showed that she was alive.

The Knight took Benoni into his arms and made a step towards Singoalla. Their heads leaned against each other. Erland’s brown curls mingled,

Singoalla

as of old, with the black waves that rippled over Singoalla's forehead.

The cave was still. Where now are the agony, wrath, and bitter memories that had dwelt there? Where now the sighs of sorrow that had echoed there? Where the wild cries that had burst from Singoalla's breast when the burden of her despair grew unbearable? Now only a sob was heard from time to time. Erland put his arm round Singoalla and whispered — she did not hear what — and it sounded as a breath of wind that rocks itself to sleep in the crown of the birch-tree.

But Assim's eyes gleamed outside the cave. He gnashed his teeth with pain. He desired Singoalla's happiness, but for him, the scorned lover, to *see* this happiness! He would rather die by fire!

Singoalla passed her hand over Erland's face; and asked in a whisper, with tearful eyes, tender, strange questions:

“Why are you so pale, Erland? Why have the roses of your cheek withered? Whither has

The Secret Power

your youth flown? I dreamed you were still seventeen. Erland, have you been unhappy?"

"Where have you been so long, Singoalla?" asked Erland in return. "Do you remember the home of our happiness, where the pine-tree whispered and the brook murmured? Ah! the pine still whispers, the brook still murmurs. The past has returned, we are young again. Come, Singoalla, let us play, and gather flowers by the banks of the brook! The hour of meeting is come; the stars in the heavens are twinkling. Can you not see them?"

Erland took hold of Singoalla's hand and led her out of the cave. Scarcely thinking, conscious of a feeling of bliss only, Singoalla followed him. She wandered with drooping brow dreamingly by the Knight's side. She did not see either the stars or the trees between which she passed. Oh, might this happiness never end! Would they might play by the brook and die ere the morning came with its cold light and cruel reality! Night, with its dreams, ecstasies, flickering shadows, and twinkling stars, the feeling of vagueness and vastness, and enwrapping all, the dear dreams which have their

Singoalla

birth in the bosom of darkness—what is the sun with his golden light, day with all it has to show—its cold truth—to these!

Benoni accompanied his father and mother. His little face shone. A power unknown stirred in his bosom and made him sing, and the song sounded as if it were meant only for the spirits that hover through the night.

They came to the hill near the brook; it was not far from the cave. Erland and Singoalla sat down on the grassy turf at the foot of the hill where they had sat of yore. But they could not play nor gather flowers; they only rested, almost as if benumbed, leaning against each other. They could not speak, but only sigh, and—half-waking, half-dreaming—felt each other's presence.

But Benoni sat down at the brink of the brook, looked at the stars which were reflected in it, and sang to them.

Thus the hours passed, and the stars, one after another, grew dim in the western haze. A grey fog mingled with the gloom; the ground was moistened with morning dew.



“They only rested.”



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The Secret Power

Then Benoni went up to his father, put his hand upon his shoulder, and said to him :

“The night is far spent. Up, and follow me!”

The Knight awoke from his trance with pain; his will bent to Benoni's; he was obliged to obey.

This Benoni did because it was already long past midnight, and the secret power by means of which Benoni's soul ruled the Knight began to wane. The boy felt this from the chilliness and weakness of his limbs.

“Mother,” said he to Singoalla, “come! I am faint and cold. We must make haste.”

“Say farewell, mother! We must make haste,” repeated Benoni anxiously.

Singoalla arose.

“Farewell,” she whispered to the Knight.

“No, no,” said Erland; “here we will stay for ever.”

“We shall meet again. Farewell!”

“Flee, mother! Do not tarry!” urged Benoni.

“Come,” said the boy; “you must follow me, father.”

Singoalla

And Benoni took hold of his hand, and he was obliged to follow. With speedy steps they returned to the castle, rowed across the sound, mounted the tower-stairs, and entered the bed-chamber.


“Take off your clothes, and sleep!” ordered Benoni. The Knight obeyed. Benoni wrapped himself up in his quilt, lay down on his mat, and fell asleep at once.

The hour-glass was still whispering, the paling stars peeped into the tower-chamber, the Knight was asleep in his bed, the pilgrim on his mat.

An hour later day dawned. The birds tuned their songs; the servants of the castle awoke; and from the forest came the ring of the woodman’s busy axe.

V.

DAY AND NIGHT.

 HE Knight awoke with a feeling of heaviness. Benoni, too, awoke the moment after, tired, but with an echo of the happiness of the past night in his breast. "Father!" he was nearly saying to Erland, for he well remembered the words of fatherly love the Knight had spoken in the night. But the word "father" died on the boy's lips as he glanced up and perceived the gloomy look on the Knight's face.

The Knight woke with an oath. "I dreamed a fearful dream last night. Evil spirits have harassed me. One of them bore the features of—you, Benoni."

Erland speedily dressed and hurried out to refresh himself in the morning breeze. All day long he was gloomy. He spoke little to his wife Helen, and to Benoni still less, he did not caress his little son, and often scolded his servants.

Singoalla

Towards evening Erland rode out. Benoni hastened to the cave in the forest. Singoalla was sitting there, still dazed by the memories of the past night. Assim was cooking food in a kettle hung over the fire, and said nothing.

Singoalla pressed Benoni to her bosom, covered him with kisses, and asked for his father.

“My father!” replied Benoni. “Ah, I may not call him father to-day. He is angry, and says that he has dreamed an evil dream last night.”

“Did he say it was evil?” asked Singoalla, broodingly.

“Yes.”

“That cannot be. He loves me. Our forefathers have said that when the secret power works, a man shows his very soul. No, his heart loves me dearly. Oh, that night, that happy night! Benoni, you shall bring again my Knight to me to-night. But before that I will show myself to him, and prove to you that he loves me still. Come, Benoni, I am going to the castle.”

“Mother,” cried Benoni, “you are only making sorrow for yourself. Remember the Knight’s wife, Lady Helen!”



The Seized his Bow.



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Day and Night

“She!” broke in Singoalla, and her eyes flashed. “I am the Knight’s first and only wife, as truly as there lives a God in heaven. He does not love her; he cannot. Did you not see, did you not hear last night? Me—me alone—does his soul love. I will go to him.”

All Benoni said was useless. She went, and Benoni followed her, crying and entreating. She went, for doubt to which she longed to give the lie, jealousy which she flouted in vain, were awake in her mind. Assim shouldered his bow and followed her at a distance.

After wandering a while, Singoalla, accompanied by Benoni, came to a gently sloping height, over which lay her way. On reaching the top she stopped, for she saw below the Knight on his horse. His face was gloomy and terrifying; his horse was covered with foam, and a bow hung at his saddle.

He saw her, stopped, passed his hand across his eyes, gazed at her, and cried out:

“Damned sprite! Heathen witch! Do you persecute me even in daylight?”

And he seized his bow, laid an arrow on the string, and loosed it.

Singoalla

But Singoalla was already gone. Assim had dashed forth, snatched her away, and carried her out of sight. Then Assim bent his bow and flew back to requite the shot, but by that time the Knight was out of range.

When Assim came back, Singoalla was sitting on the green moss, staring before her. Benoni sat beside her, silent, and longing for death.

“Singoalla,” said Assim, bending over her. “Shall I kill Erland? I have a poisoned arrow in my quiver, and my aim is good.”

“I have a right to his blood. Kill him!” said Singoalla.

Assim left her. His eyes shone with joy. There was even yet hope for him.

But his joy was brief. Singoalla called him back. Assim came.

“No, Assim! Not yet, Assim!” said Singoalla. “No, not yet!” she repeated, and laid her hand on her forehead while she thought. “Benoni shall to-night lead the traitor to me, and I will then judge him, and if the sentence be death, you, Assim, shall kill him. . . .”

“Ha!” she added, rising proudly; “the fair-

Day and Night

haired woman, his blue-eyed Helen, holds him in the daytime; but mine, mine he is in the night, for he is the slave of Benoni's power. Farewell, Benoni. I will wait for you and him to-night. To-night shall his doom be spoken."

The evening hours were long for Singoalla, as she sat by the log-fire, waiting in the cave for that hour of doom. "Benoni, apple of mine eye, your strength will not fail . . ." so she spoke to herself. "Grind on! . . ." said she to Assim, who unweariedly, and with the calmness of desperation, kept sharpening his sword on a rock.

But for Benoni, too, how long were the hours for him! How weird the time when the Knight again yielded to his power! How awful this wandering in the night in the forest at his father's side!

"Benoni, my son . . ." were the words that fell from the Knight's lips. But Benoni shuddered at them. They were not his father's, but those of an illusive ghost speaking with his father's tongue.

"Benoni, you know not how I love you," said the Knight, as they walked in the night.

"No, let go my hand! You must not touch me. I will not be your son."

Singoalla

“The night is dark, clouds are sailing across the sky . . . and you, Benoni, speak words which freeze my blood. Do you see the clouds in the sky, my own Benoni?”

“Yes, it is beginning to rain. Hasten! I will bring you to my unhappy mother.”

The rain fell in streams. There was a rustle in the forest; no star lit their lonely path. Night-birds screeched from the clefts, and by the boy's side walked a pale phantom with half-closed eyes.

They came to the pile of rocks. Benoni stopped, and another shudder thrilled through his limbs. He thought of Assim's sword, of the doom which was awaiting his father, and he stopped and wished himself dead.

“Benoni, give me your hand. You are leading me to Singoalla, are you not? Unkind Benoni! I will tell your mother of your bitter words to your father,” was the Knight's caressing threat.

But Benoni wept.

“Why do you weep? Why are you angry with me? Come, Benoni! Calm yourself. I will not blame you to Singoalla.”

And the Knight made as if to enter the rocks.

Day and Night

But the will of Benoni kept him back, and he cried out in haste :

“No, stay! Are you not afraid, Sir Erland?”

“The wind is blowing in the forest, but who is afraid of wind and darkness?” replied the Knight
“You are only a child, boy.”

“Do you not hear what the wind is telling? It is a sad tale, and should make you afraid.”

“What is the wind saying? Tell me its tale. I will listen gladly if you will wipe away your tears and be happy.”

While the Knight was speaking thus, he leaned against a rock, smiled, and lifted his forehead towards the dark sky. A shadow peeped from the pile of rocks.

“The wind says, ‘My mother bore me one night in the churchyard. She was seeking for the grave of her husband, but he was not dead.’”

“Did you hear the wind say this, strange boy? What is it saying now?”

“The wind says, ‘My father was a knight who ranged the wide world over—a man of fickle mind and faithless.’”

“Then the wind is like its father.”

Singoalla

“My mother sought him out and wandered from country to country, but found him not. She believed she was beloved and sought by him. She thought he was very unhappy, and wept for him, and her tears fell like dew on the meadow, like rain on the mountains.”

“Did the wind say this? But what is it saying now? I hear it only blustering through the forest.”

“The wind says, ‘My father was not unhappy, for he had forgotten my mother, and did not seek for her. He loved another—a woman who came from the North.’”

“The wind has a faithless father,” said the Knight. “But hark how it is moaning in the forest! The wind is speaking again. What does it say now?”

“The wind says, ‘I was nursed at a sighing breast; I was lulled to rest by songs of sorrow. My mother is very unhappy.’”

The Knight bowed his head and folded his arms across his breast.

“Benoni,” he said, “you who understand the language of the wind, what is it saying now? It

Day and Night

is shouting now, and angry, and the tree-tops are trembling.”

The shadow drew nearer to the speakers.

Benoni replied :

“The wind says, ‘My father tried to kill my mother to-day ; he shot an arrow at her breast, but she fled. Why do you hate my mother? What has she done to offend you? Answer me, Knight.’”

The Knight bent his head to his breast and said :

“Benoni, did your mother say that it was night when you were born? Did she say she bore you among the graves of the dead while she was seeking your father’s grave?”

“Yes.”

“The mist disperses and I am gazing into two worlds. I know now who I am when the sun is in the sky. I am mad during the day, Benoni. I wanted to kill your mother. I hate your mother in the day-time, for then I am mad. Will not your mother kill me for my faithlessness, my cruelty, for all the agony I have caused her? Benoni, ask your mother if she wants to take my life. It is her right.”

Singoalla

But Benoni replied :

“Do you hear how the wind is wailing? Can I lead my father to death?”

And Benoni, shuddering at the thought of Assim's sword, grasped the Knight's hand to flee with him back to the castle.

Then the listening shadow stepped forth from the gloom.

“Flee,” it whispered to Benoni, “for Assim rages and scents blood. He is lying in wait at the entrance of the cave. I have aroused but cannot lull his anger.”

The Knight recognised the voice of the whispering shadow, turned round, and tried to seize its gown.

But it repeated anxiously, “Flee, Benoni! Assim hears us.”

Benoni hastened forwards, and the Knight was obliged to follow, though his soul was in an agony.

But Singoalla too—for she it was who had appeared like a fitful shadow—followed Benoni, and when they were at some way from the rock where danger and death lurked, begged him to stay.

Day and Night

The Knight sank at Singoalla's feet and embraced her knees.

Singoalla stooped over him and stroked his locks.

"Erland," she said, "we see each other for the last time on earth. Farewell, my beloved!"

"Must I die?"

"No," replied Singoalla. "I meant truly to kill you to-night, but then my soul was black with wrath and despair. Now you shall live, Erland, for your wife and son. You love Helen, do you not? and she loves you. . . . And your little son, tell me, is he more like you or your blue-eyed Helen? I would like to caress your little son."

"Hush!" exclaimed Erland. "Do not speak of Helen! During the day when my wits are confounded, truly I live in peace with her. But you, Singoalla, are my only real love, as you are my first and rightful wife."

"Do not deceive me," said Singoalla beseechingly; "speak not so, or I shall again cherish hopes which will be disappointed afterwards, and which will leave wrath and despair in their train! Was

Singoalla

I not misled by your words when Benoni at first led you to me? I believed you always loved me, and that it was your bliss to look upon me. Then I determined to seek you. But you shuddered at the very sight of me, and were angry and wanted to kill me. Erland, you hate me during the day; you can love me only by night, when the secret power of Benoni has enchained your will."

"There is truth in your words, but not the whole truth, for now my mind is clear," said the Knight. "I am not the same man during the day as when I am with you. In the day-time I am unhappy and not in my right mind; no, not in my right mind. Do you remember Assim and your father? For the evil they did me, my dazed soul blamed you. To my morbid thoughts you became an unfading image of terror, and your own sweet name, Singoalla, had for mine ears a ring of dread. Then there came a girl who was my childhood's friend and my nurse when I lay sick. I thought I loved her; but you were always the woman I loved, my wife; it was you who wore a mask like Helen's face. No, I never loved Helen, but you in Helen; that I know now. Singoalla, if you will not kill me for

Day and Night

the sake of justice, of my broken oath, and the agony I have caused you, kill me for my own sake, for I shudder at the thought of the morrow. I will not awake to madness and hatred of you who are the very soul of my soul.”

Singoalla replied :

“Your perjury is forgiven; you shall not die. Nor shall your words lure me to believe that you love not Helen, at least during the day, and when you are not in your right mind. What matters it that you are mad, Erland, as long as you are happy? Behold, I came to this neighbourhood and sent you my son to subdue your soul through gentleness (for on an unkind soul the secret power will not work), and then lead you to me. I took up my abode in yonder cave, and waited for you eleven days. I longed to see you and speak with you once more before my death; for I feel I shall soon die. That was the recompense I demanded from God for all the sorrows I had suffered, and this recompense God in His mercy has given me. What more do I want for myself? It is harder to think of Benoni, for what will become of him when I am dead? In the day-time, when your soul is hostile, he is no

Singoalla

longer your son. But God will protect Benoni if he keep his soul snow-white, and Benoni, too, will not live long. I have seen that in the lines of your fate, my pale, beloved boy! . . . No, Erland, to-night we part for ever. To-morrow, when you awake, you will remember me as an evil dream, whose memory is carried away by the day's breath. The image of Singoalla shall no more disturb your thoughts, her name never more sound in your ears; she will have vanished as completely as if she had never been. But should she ever come back to your soul, in a moment of loneliness, then remember her not as a revengeful, heathen woman, nor as a sorrowing one; but think of her rather as one who forgave, and who rejoices at the night of love you gave her in the cave by the margin of the brook! Your life with Helen shall flow like a calm river through green meadows beneath cooling shade. Your Erland shall grow up to be the joy of your old age. Your house shall long be in the land, and the blessing of your God shall abide with it."

"Farewell, Erland!" she went on to say.
"Farewell, boy at the brook! Farewell, my first

Day and Night

and only love! Farewell, my happiness and my bane! Blessed be you, my husband! Blessed be you, my joy, my sunlight, my spirit, mine all!"

And Singoalla pressed the kiss she thought would be her last on Erland's lips, and hurried away.

Tears were streaming down Erland's cheeks; he wrung his hands and called her name aloud; but she was gone, and Benoni's power chained him to the spot.

Then Erland burst out into such cries of woe that they pierced Benoni's marrow. The little lad trembled and felt his power wane, his will weaken, his heart melt.

"Benoni," cried the Knight, "I will crush you if you do not swear by God to lead me back to Singoalla next night and every night."

"I swear," sighed Benoni, almost fainting.

"Quick! Let us return to the castle before I awake! I feel that your power is waning, and I shall soon awake. Make haste, or else we shall be lost."

Benoni walked with swift strides. Erland followed him. Scarcely a quarter of an hour after

Singoalla

wards the Knight was resting in his bed and the pilgrim on his mat.

But Assim in vain lay in wait for his prey outside the cave with the sharp-ground sword in his hand. When Singoalla came back to the cave she said only, "The Knight will not come." Assim struck his sword so hard against the rock that it broke at the hilt, then hurried to the shore and beguiled the night by mocking the night-birds and rolling stones down rocks into the lake.

VI.

THE LAST NIGHT-WANDERING.

BENONI kept his oath.

And Singoalla—she who had already reconciled herself to the thought of eternal separation and death—soon forgot her resolution when the Knight returned next night led by Benoni, and entreated her to stay. He said that madness and Helen held him during the day, but he would belong to bliss and Singoalla by night. He called her wife, and begged her to keep the oath she had sworn on the image of Alako, even though he himself had been forced by evil powers to break his. How sweet were his caresses to the unhappy being whose all he had been from her young years! How beautiful were these nights, thrilled through by the feeling of their meeting in secret, when they whispered to each other in the cave, or, in infinite wistfulness, sat hand in hand on the banks of the brook! Singo-

Singoalla

alla could not resist ; she stayed, and the hours were to her like a fantastic dream.

On the twentieth day after the pilgrim's arrival at the castle of Ekö, he returned from the forest with the Mass-chalice in his hand. It was delivered to the Prior, and all wondered at the truth of the revelation and the power of the penance.

But in Erland a change took place, which became more evident every day. Formerly he had been melancholy at times, now he was so from morning till night. He grew fearfully thin; his eyes were sunken, his cheeks hollow; every day ploughed a furrow in his brow, every hour poured oil on the awful fire in his bosom. The servants quaked when he approached; Lady Helen dared no longer ask what it was that consumed him, for he seemed to foreknow, as it were, when such a question was on her lips, and then withdrew from her. He was cold to his wife's sad looks, shunned her caresses, and had no eyes for his little son. He seldom spoke a word to anybody.

Lady Helen disclosed to the Prior her anxiety for Erland, and consulted him as to what ought to be done to save him, for clearly this melancholy was



The Last Night Wandering.



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The Last Night-Wandering

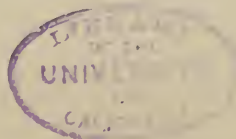
hurrying him to the grave. The Prior resolved to speak frankly to the Knight, and to urge him to complete confession.

“Does any sin oppress your soul, my son? Or what is it that makes you despair? Do not brood over your pain, or death of the soul as well as of the body may come of it! Flee into the arms of God and Holy Church! Lo, she is willing, as you know, to take your guilt and your sorrow upon her.”

Thus spake the Prior to the Knight. But the Knight replied, “Vex me not with such words, reverend Father! Speak not again of it, or I shall leave you and flee to other lands. Leave me in peace. When the time comes, I will confess.”

Another time, when the Knight seemed in a somewhat calmer mood, he said to the Prior, “My soul is full of broken pictures. I strive to put them together again; that is why my brains are so racked. When the picture is made ready, I shall see what I wish to see; I shall know what I wish to know. Then only shall I be able to confess, for one cannot confess the unknown.”

During these days Benoni, according to his wont, waited on Erland, but he had now no more



Singoalla

leisure, for the Knight would hardly ever let him out of his sight. But if he had no leisure, his hours were the more bitter. When the Knight looked at him his glance burned with suppressed threats, fear, and fierce mistrust. He awaited Benoni's every word, watched his every movement. When they were alone, he would rise, grip Benoni's arms, and lift him from the floor to fling him back to it. But he remembered, and it ended with more blue marks on Benoni's arms.

Benoni suffered greatly. His cheeks grew paler than ever, and he became almost a shadow. But he endured patiently the Knight's ill-treatment, counted the hours of the day, and thought with joy that when night came his grim face would grow kind, his wild look gentle, and his dumb lips call him son, and tell him that he loved him dearly. The night was Benoni's day, and the day was his night. During the day his mother sat alone with the silent Assim in the forest; during the day his father and he were unhappy; but the night made the three drunk with happiness.

With the Knight it came to such a pass that he fell into a fever, in which he once started from his

The Last Night-Wandering

bed, and would have sent his sword through Benoni. The boy was saved by the Prior and another monk who watched by the bed of the sick man. During the excitement occasioned by the fever, the Knight spoke often of a cave and a hill on which a pine-tree grew; sometimes he called Benoni "Son," sometimes "Little devil." Indeed, his fever was violent, and his brain filled with disordered visions.

Through these days Singoalla in vain waited for her knight; but Benoni often went to see her.

When Erland grew well, he resolved to make confession. The Prior was not a little frightened when the Knight confessed that he was possessed of two devils. One had appeared to him in the guise of a woman; the other in the shape of Benoni, doubtless to bring to scorn the pilgrim and his pious errand.

Father Henry, in secret, called the Knight to the monastery chapel, and conjured the evil powers to yield. The Knight felt relieved, and thought himself quit of them.

But on the following day the trouble came back. When he awoke in the morning, the Knight

Singoalla

remembered that he had all night long been harassed by the two evil spirits.

Not long afterwards it came to pass that Erland awoke, not in his bed but in the forest. All about was lit by pale moonlight, but when, in his amazement, he looked round, he saw a flitting shape like Benoni. How had they come into the forest? He wasted no time in thought, but hurried after the phantom. But when the Knight opened the door of the tower-chamber, the little pilgrim lay on his mat.

After this Erland's thoughts moved in their old path. He strove unceasingly to piece together the broken images in his soul, and make them fit in one whole. He gathered together all his memories of the trances of the night, chose those which agreed, threw aside the rest, watched more closely Benoni's behaviour, and made up his mind to lie awake and watch.

This resolution, however, he was not able to keep. When evening came, he felt so languid that, try as he would, he could not keep sleep away. And by his vow he must sleep alone with Benoni.

By-and-by, after untiring brooding, the Knight succeeded in getting his picture done. It was a

The Last Night-Wandering

dismal one, a mosaic of broken, confused recollections, but still, when put together, had some look of truth.

From the evenings, and from the half-waking mood which precedes sleep, he remembered more and more clearly that two shadows moved to and fro across his forehead, and that Benoni's eyes glimmered between them like stars amidst clouds.

He remembered wandering in the forest at Benoni's side, and during the day he tried to find again the path he believed he had trodden during the night. But his memory baffled him and played him tricks, and he walked altogether another way, sometimes miles astray, instead of the one which led to the pile of rocks.

And he remembered why he wandered, and his trysts with Singoalla; but his memory was linked to the horror his fancy held of the brown heathen girl, and hence was set about with a thick mist, from out of which glimmered fitfully most dreadful shapes.

But his mistrust of Benoni was now rooted fast. He brooded over a plan. Every evening he went to bed he hoped to be able to carry it out; but

Singoalla

Benoni's power overcame him. All the lad's being seemed to melt into this power.

The fortieth day after Benoni's arrival at Ekö Castle had come. It was a cloudy day, with wind and rain. The waves foamed on the lake, the tops of the forest trees bent, clouds gathered round the crags. The sun sank behind dark, wan clouds. Evening came on, and the gloomy brooder went to his tower-chamber accompanied, as always, by the pilgrim. But the Knight had first hidden a keen-edged hunting-knife in his doublet.

Erland went to bed. Benoni lay down on his mat. The hour-glass whispered, the vanes on the roof creaked, the waves of the lake roared.

Before going to bed the Knight had said he was very tired; he fell at once into his natural sleep, as Benoni heard from his breathing.

Then the pilgrim stole up to the Knight's bed, and his little hands moved like thin shadows over the forehead of the sleeper and down towards his breast.

But only for a very short while. The Knight sat up.

"The power works already," said the little

The Last Night-Wandering

one to himself. "Arise and follow me!" he bade softly.

The Knight arose. Benoni seized his hand, led him down the stairs, through the noise of waves and foam, into the forest.

"It is an awful night," said the boy, with his locks fluttering in the wind. "Hark, how it howls around us! How cold the wind is! What if the trees fall on us, father! Let us make haste!"

"Where are you taking me?" asked the Knight dreamily.

"To whom else should I lead you than to Singoalla, my mother?" said Benoni, wondering.

"Then Singoalla is your mother?"

"Surely. How strangely you talk to-night!"

The Knight saw without doubt that his questions were not fitly put, and that he had better be silent, for he walked a long time at the pilgrim's side without uttering a word.

Thus they went deeper and deeper into the forest.

The dark, wind-driven clouds, like a storm-crippled ship, drifted about the heavens, and ever

Singoalla

and anon let the moon shed a sickly yellow light over the fields. The branches swung to and fro, and the waving leaves threw a shifting lattice, flecked with a thousand lights and shadows where the moonlight struck the forest, and all things seemed living, moving, and leaping in weird medley. But where the leaves were thicker and the trees stood closer, pitchy darkness brooded over the path of the two wanderers.

What was that shining yonder, far away amongst the trunks of the trees? It was not moonlight, but the red flames spread by torches. There came a sound of voices in the forest which were not those of the wind, and they cried :

“Alako, have mercy! Alako . . . Alako . . . !”

Benoni grew frightened. The Knight muttered, “The spirits of hell are met together to-night.”

“Father,” said the boy, pressing closer to him, “I am afraid . . . it is an awful night . . . protect me !”

“Father !” said Erland to himself ; “a strange word for this strange pilgrim from hell’s depth to use. Do not fear,” he added aloud, seizing the

The Last Night-Wandering

boy roughly by the arm ; “nobody shall take you from me.”

So they wandered on under the creaking, groaning, and moaning trees ; through pale yellow moonshine and black shadows. And ever, but farther off, resounded cries of many voices : “Alako! Alako!” In the hiss of the storm, in the moan of the lake, in the ghostly moonlight, in the phantom flying clouds themselves, there was a weird, foreboding feeling of death.

“Alako!” thought the Knight, listening scornfully to this cry ; “what does that word mean? Where have I heard it before? Ah, I know it . . . the spell that put fetters on my soul. But to-night it sounds in vain. To-night all charms are powerless against my purpose.”

He stopped and looked with wrath and a shudder up at the moon, and the face on it seemed clearer than ever, a face stamped with riddle and mystery. The Knight lifted his arm with fist clenched towards the silent watcher in the sky, and his soul spoke through tightened lips : “You, yes, you, with the cursed gift of the silver sickle tied the spirit of my kin to yours by night,

Singoalla

and in the depths of the forests; you, who would revenge our conversion to the Lord Christ by driving the heathen woman, a black-eyed vampire, to suck my heart's blood! Oh, Alako, my curse upon you!"

They drew near the pile of rocks.

"Benoni, is the way to your mother long?" asked Erland, groping in his doublet for the dagger.

"You speak strangely again . . . as if you did not know," said Benoni, watching his father's face. It was not as it used to be when the secret power worked in him. It was gloomy as in the day-time, more dark and ghastly.

A terrible fear rushed through the boy's soul. He stopped and exclaimed, while his soul quaked:

"Sir, let us return to the castle. Follow me!"

"A fool's thought, truly, since we have come out and wandered so long in storm and darkness to find your mother! No, pious pilgrim, we will continue our way. Doubtless we shall soon be there."

The Last Night-Wandering

“We return! I bid you!”

“A merry jest, indeed! Are you not my servant? Am I not your master? Who commands?”

No doubt remained. The secret power in which the little guide had trusted when he said, “I bid you,” worked no longer. Benoni’s will was master no more. The Knight was awake; and Benoni saw it in his wild looks.

Seized with an agony as of death, he fell down at the feet of the Knight, embraced his knees, and entreated him :

“Sir . . . father . . . do me no hurt!”

“What do you fear? Is your conscience evil? Listen—no trickery! Up with you, boy, and lead me to your mother!”

Erland seized the boy roughly by the arm, and pulled him up.

“I will lead you to her. But . . . you will not kill her? You will not do my mother any harm, will you?”

“Think not of her safety, but of your own,” said the Knight. “Will you obey, or dare you defy me?”

Singoalla

“Sir, I obey. . . . I obey gladly, but promise . . .”

“Peace!” cried the Knight, and, unable to hide any longer his mood, unsheathed his hunting-knife. “You are in league with your mother, and as truly as she has sucked the life out of my heart, I vow that her own heart shall this night quiver on my knife. And for you, if you stay a moment to show me the way to her I swear I will kill you, and find the way myself. And if I do not find her this night, to-morrow my hunting-horn shall sound, the hounds shall be loosed, and the beaters shall draw in round this witch from hell. She shall not escape me. So try not my patience with another word! Remember for your own good the oath of obedience you have sworn to me! Forward!”

“No, no!” exclaimed Benoni, as if he cried for help, and again embraced the Knight’s knees, who tore his arms asunder and spurned him with hatred and loathing.

“Wretch, whom I could crush with a blow of my fist! Up, I say, and bring me to where our wandering ends! Obey or die!”

“Father, spare me! Do not kill me!”

The Last Night-Wandering

“Father!” repeated the Knight with redoubled rage; “you who with your devilish tricks have long spell-bound and ruined my soul, you the scum of hell, bastard of devil and witch, you dare to defile a Christian with the name of father! You shall die with your mother. For the last time I command. Up and show me the way!”

And as the boy did not stir, the Knight seized his arm and dragged him along. Benoni’s limbs were struck against roots of trees, and lacerated by thorn-bushes. Pain and fright wrung moans from his lips, but his lamentation, and the feeble resistance he made, exhausted the patience of the Knight, who was revelling in dreams of blood. He stopped, looked at his victim with bitterest detestation, and plunged his dagger into his breast.

He had gone a few steps from the spot, which was stained with Benoni’s blood, when he stopped and said to himself:

“‘Father!’ What a lie!”

He again went a few steps, but stopped and repeated:

“‘Father!’ A lie, cruel, shocking, and past forgiveness! I will return and shout in his ear,

Singoalla

‘You lied! I am not your father.’ . . . I will cry,
‘Cursed be you for this lie!’”

A black cloud passed over the moon and left the land in darkness. But the Knight fancied he heard the death-rattle of some one, and guided himself by the sound. His foot struck against a body. He bent down over it. At this moment the cloud passed away. The moon shone on a face which was not Benoni’s, a face awfully twisted and livid, sprinkled with bloody foam, the face of an unknown, swarthy man. His breast was naked, and the Knight, who looked at him amazed, saw on it the marks of the mighty slayer of men : boils and black spots.

“The Plague!” muttered the Knight with paling lips.

He rose and walked on without knowing whither. He put his hand to his forehead, and the blood rushed through his whirling brain. Now he quickened his pace ; now he stopped and looked up at the wan, sad moon. He walked without thought or aim. He heard at times the leaves of the trees whisper words so horrible that he started at them ; sometimes words so mocking that he

The Last Night-Wandering

gnashed his teeth with anger, and tore from their branches the leaves which had whispered thus; sometimes words so droll that he burst out laughing, sometimes so sad that he shed tears.

Most strangely of all, however, did the pine up on yonder hill, at the trysting-place by the forest brook, whisper to the night-wanderer who approached it, for thither had chance directed his steps. It stood there as of old, slender, straight, proud, and braving the storm. Did the old pine-tree mourn for the broken spirit? Did it pity the gaunt figure, which formerly was so noble in its pride and strength? Or did it mock him? He could not tell, but he longed to make sure, and listened, and while listening he heard from the height yonder, or from within his own bosom, a theme which rang thus in his memory:

.
"Out yonder stands the hill where trees

Whisper so soft in evening's breeze.

Oh, heart, thou soarest!

Art there, Singoalla? Though these eyes cannot see thee,

Whence else can that fragrant perfume come, I prithee?

The forest lies silent, by man 'tis unriden,

Yet it echoes 'Singoalla,' that name comes unbidden.

Singoalla

Is that the dark form of fir-tree low bending?
Or rose-tree spread out to the wind's gentle tending?
My heart says, 'Singoalla here waits love's caressing,'
So I press on, to press near, with love past expressing!

Ah! sweet it is to meet one's Love!
But sweeter far when twilights rove
O'er field and forest."

Ah, why recall that ditty? Why sing it now? It has neither scorn nor pity in it, but is merely meaningless nonsense. A man may neither hate it nor mock it. Of that the night-wanderer felt sure. Then he remembered the dagger which he still carried in his hand, and looking at the blade in the moonshine, he thought:

"Perhaps this is blood of my blood."

He flung the weapon from him, and fancied himself almost at ease. Indeed, his soul and mind were so split and riven that he did not know himself. Cut a snake into pieces, and each will quiver and twitch like a living thing ere all become stiff and dead scraps of what was once alive. But why they should try to join and become one again, according to popular belief, this the wanderer in the dark could not understand. He

The Last Night-Wandering

desired no such reunion. Ay, to die was best, and he might surely smile at death, since he knew that death was passing over the world, and would root out the murderous brood bred from dust. Afterwards the grass and flowers would grow unharmed by cattle, and no axe would fell the trees as unhampered they wove their boughs into one vault over the silent earth. Then Paradise would be restored in all its splendour. But let no Adam and Eve come and spoil it again! After a new Adam would follow a new Cain who killed his brother, and after Cain would come fathers who killed their sons, and sons who killed their fathers. And with such misty thoughts the Knight walked at random in the forest.

So it came to pass that towards daybreak he saw a gleam of fire, and thither directed his steps.

VII.

DAWN.

THE firelight came from the pile of rocks.

This night, Singoalla had decided, and had so told Benoni, was to be the last night of her happiness. Was this a forecast of what this very same night was to bring in its train? No. Though Singoalla possessed a true spirit of divination, which exercise had strengthened, she would have declared that it was a resolution, not a prediction. The happiness she had enjoyed was ineffable. It had reduced to nought all that she had suffered, and her heart swelled with thankfulness to God for the strange joy of these nights, for the hours spent at the side of her darling and husband. They were now numbered, these hours, for she saw that Erland could not bear them. He would die if the gulf between the life of day and night continued. But would not the recollection of them be mighty

Dawn

enough to sweeten the grief she must feel after bidding Erland her last, irrevocable farewell, and for leaving the neighbourhood for ever? Yet why regret? Cannot life become a dream, where the imagination gives the heart all that it desires, where the past is recalled and lives again, and leaves no room for regret? Yes, Singoalla would dream away the rest of her life. Beyond the sea, far beyond the steppes eastward, there is a country where the palms tower up to a sky of sapphire, and the air is drowsy and thick with the fragrance of flowers. It is the land of rest and dreams. There stands a strange temple, hewn out of the rock, guarded by silent priests, all in robes of white. There slumber on soft cushions, in the shade of the porticoes, priestesses whose only duty is, to the noise of drums, to dance clad in raiment of gold and pearls—a dance in sacrifice to the gods of the flesh, the lords of things without us that vanish and change, and which ends, when the drums cease, in dreaming on eternal nothingness undisturbed. Thither will Singoalla make her way when she leaves the country of the pine forest. There she will tell to the palms tales of the spruce-tree of the

Singoalla

North, she will tell the lotus of the water-lily, and will tell herself for ever a story of a blue-eyed youth, and sing it as a lullaby to her heart till it slumbers. Benoni will be the young priest in this temple, for the incense of its god must be kindled by a boy, in whose beauty it is easy to read the doom of early death. There, in sacred writings guarded by the priests, Benoni will learn the wisdom of times long past, before the prophecy which she had read in the veins of his eyelids had been fulfilled.

Thus Singoalla had resolved. She had adorned herself as for a farewell feast. She was more beautiful to-night than on that day ten years ago, when Erland saw her for the first time by the forest brook. Happiness had restored her youthful beauty, but with a hint in it of the world of spirits and angels. The love and nobility which penetrated her being made her beauty seem rather of heaven than earth. That would have dazzled the eye as if of another world, had it not kept at the same time somewhat which was of this world, but part of its unfathomable depth, something of the pine-forest's rustling, something of the starry night's mystery,

Dawn

something weird, something that whispered of Life and its symbol. . . .

The cave was adorned with the last roses of autumn. Assim had kindled the fire on the hearth. Singoalla had told him that he did it now for the last time, and Assim had received the news without a word. Singoalla had asked him to have everything ready for departure on the morrow, and in silence he had fulfilled her wish. He now stood gazing silently at the fire, watching how the brands darkened, were charred and turned to ashes. Sometimes it seemed to him as if he looked not in the fire of the hearth but into that in his own heart.

Singoalla was sitting on her bed of moss, leaning her head on her hand, lost in dreams, or listening to sounds which might herald the arrival of those whom she awaited eagerly. Thus would she sit hour after hour. Her life during these days had been made of such waiting. She hardly perceived the flight of time, though she counted the moments.

Outside, the storm raged. Now and then a gust of wind found its way between the flat rocks into

Singoalla

the cave and threatened to extinguish the fire that illumined it.

“They tarry to-night,” said Assim after hours of silence. His words needed no reply, and received none: and he said to himself, as he put a few boughs on the fire, “The fire will burn a little while longer—soon it will be extinguished—that is well. We shall have peace.”

Assim went to the mouth of the cave and looked up to the sky, where the moon was wandering among the clouds, and listened with joy to the song of the storm. He felt that the forest of the North had never sounded so grandly. He wished to set his feelings to words, but could not. But he understood that in some way there were blended in the song, dignity and wrath, agony and manly courage, dark trial, and certainty of victory.

But amongst these tones there were others which were not those of the storm. From out the forest came shouts of “Alako, Alako!” and Assim’s countenance, which had till now shown something poetical and dreamy, now became all awake with listening astonishment. When he felt sure that

Dawn

his ear had not deceived him, he said in a loud voice to Singoalla :

“There are some here in the forest calling upon the god of our people !”

“It is the echo of my prayer,” said Singoalla, lifting up her head; “I have asked the god of our people to give me strength for renunciation, and have received it. But do you not hear other voices in the forest? The voices of Erland and Benoni?”

“No.”

“The night is terrifying for such as are fearful. Perhaps Benoni’s heart trembles and fear leads his steps astray. Go and meet them, Assim, and lead them hither.”

“There is much to be learned in the forest to-night,” said Assim as he went. And when he returned, he carried the dying boy in his arms and laid him down at Singoalla’s feet.

Truly it was a work of labour to find a way through, or clamber over, these rocks and crags with which the ground was so thickly strewn, and the worse as it was night, and the only light was

Singoalla

the uncertain moonlight. The Knight, however, seemed to have so little difficulty that he fancied he must have traversed the rough path more than once, so familiar did it seem. It struck him, too, as being curious that never in his boyhood, in spite of his many wanderings in the forest recesses, had he ever lighted upon this strange path before—a path which seemed to lead to the very castle of the mountain king.

But he had not advanced far from the entrance of the cave, when a sudden thought struck him: "What was the reason of this night's wandering?" Was it to follow the example of the heathen god Thor by killing the most spiteful witch of all the forest—that seducing giantess who had sucked the life's power from his heart? But he remembered the Plague had come upon the world, to root out every living thing, and so render all other killing needless, ay, mean and ridiculous. He remembered also the pale boy and the word "father," and he thought of the dagger, dripping with blood that cried for vengeance, which he had flung amongst the bushes, and of the pine-tree waving on the hill-top and its song:

Dawn

“Ah ! sweet it is to meet one’s Love !
But sweetest far when twilights rove
O’er field and forest.”

There was confusion in such a rabble of memories, and the Knight could not set them in order. “But,” he said musingly, “why give heed to any one of them, why take the least thought for anything past, present, or to come? I am out walking for the sake of a walk only, without any other purpose. I enter this cave because by chance my steps have reached it, and for no other reason whatsoever. Man’s mind is as the bed of a stream, through which his thoughts unceasingly flow. He lets them go on their way, and does not try to hold any back as they move past him.”

In this frame of mind he continued his walk and stepped carelessly into the cave.

He looked around. Beside him, leaning against the wall, there stood a man of dark complexion, who fixed his glowing eyes upon him. This did not trouble the Knight, however. It was only another of those visions to which he need give no heed. But farther on in the cave he saw something else. He saw a woman, more beautiful than his imagina-

Singoalla

tion had ever painted; more devoured by sorrow, as she knelt over the dead boy, than the Knight could have believed possible; for all the sorrow and pain he had ever known had been mixed with weakness and desire for consolation, or with despair or wrath. But this sorrow was utterly unalloyed and absolute. He recognised in this woman features which he had loved and hated, idolised and cursed. In his memory arose pictures of sunshine and fragrance of flowers, alternating with others of night and terror. He again felt confounded. Then he heard the dark man's voice saying :

“Singoalla, the Knight is here. You need no longer wait for death.”

And the man, seizing his arm, said to the Knight :

“Do not hesitate, but finish what you have begun! She knows the errand on which you come. Benoni had only time to announce you before his eyes closed in death. You come to revenge the injury Singoalla did you when she made you the light of her eyes and the desire of her heart, the husband of her promise and her son's father. She has cruelly insulted you by her love and fidelity.



Dawn.



1914
VERITY

Dawn

She deserves death, and desires it from your hands. She wants to die beside your own son, the first victim of your just wrath. Yes, she is utterly to blame, and deserves death—I swear it—I who have heard the innumerable sighs the remembrance of you has wrung from her, and seen the countless tears she has shed for your sake. Kill her, Sir Knight! and then the hour of reckoning between you and me!”

“It is needless,” said the Knight; “you are right that I came here to kill her, but the forest has changed my mind. The Plague has arrived, and it is idle to meddle with Death’s work. This and much more I have learned this night from the forest. Moreover, this woman is not the same as the one I am seeking—though they are alike. Yonder woman is a human being; she is shedding tears over her dead child, and she seems to me so sad, that I feel woe in my soul when I look at her. . . .”

“What,” cried Assim, “do you hesitate to finish what you have begun? Dare you shrink back? If you dare, you will hear the dreadful news that——”

Singoalla

“Hold!” said the Knight. “I have courage for anything and fear nothing. No one has ever yet said that I fear. I will consider this thing without flinching. Trouble me not, for there is light dawning upon my mind, and I shall soon set in order my memories. This woman’s face shines far into the deeps of what I have forgotten.”

“Make haste, then,” cried Assim; “she *wishes* to die by your hand. She cannot live and at the same time know that you, her husband, have killed her son, who is also your son. Do not be cruel to the poor woman! She desires death as a boon. Reward her for the gentleness she shows you! She has not uttered a hard word against the murderer of her child. She has accused herself, but not you. . . .”

“Yes,” said the Knight, “you are right. Her face wears a tender, touching benevolence. I love that face, although the sight of it is near making my heart melt. I am a hard and harsh man, of a hasty temper, and apt to despise mankind; but this woman would, by her mere presence, change me, the more so if I could sit down at her feet, and she

Dawn

would vouchsafe to read to me from some holy book of God's love and mercy. . . ."

"He is not the man he used to be," said Assim, shuddering; "he talks like a madman. Sir Knight," he cried out, "do not put together your recollections. Beware of the memories of your youth, or you will remember the chief's fifteen-year-old daughter, the tender child whose heart you stole. You would see a reality, and would be seized with a repentance beyond all enduring. No, keep your holy prejudices, which up till now have been your armour, your shield and bow, and rush blindly forward on the way that you have sprinkled with blood! I tell you, this dark-eyed woman is a being of a kind other than yours, a child of impenetrable Nature, who, like the flowers, has not received any other baptism than the dew and rain of heaven, never adored beneath any other temple than the star-strewn dome of the sky, and never been enveloped by incense other than the mists of the earth. She never was sprinkled with holy water, never blessed by the hands of a priest, and has no hope of entering your heaven. Understand you not that she is an outcast, a heathen, half a sorceress, a witch who,

Singoalla

with the unholy magic of her looks and face and voice, has bewitched you, and thus for her unspeakable crime has deserved death? Up, Knight, and stab her! You are without a weapon—take this sword! Murder the witch, just as you have murdered her offspring! Quick! no reflection! Quick, or it is I who will kill you!” And Assim put the sword into Erland’s hand, and tried to drag him along with him. But the Knight loosened himself from his grasp, and said calmly :

✓ “You talk as I have heard monks talk. You are seeking to confound me, but you shall not succeed. Yonder woman is no witch, but a child of God who is grieving for the misfortunes of the world, and has a heart that can feel even my misery. I will not deny that I am unhappy. I feel ready to weep and repent, though I do not know aright if I have wronged another only, or if fate also has wronged me. . . .”

He took a few steps towards Singoalla and went on :

“Poor woman, you are mourning this boy, and you know not, perhaps, that it is I who killed him. On my honour as a knight I declare that I would

Dawn

gladly give my life to redeem his and assuage your pain, but I may not do so, and therefore I promise only what I can perform—namely, that I will never again return to my roof, but, if the Plague spare me, wear a hair-shirt all my days and live on roots, and daily ask God's forgiveness for me, a sinner. This I will do. Henceforth, from this moment I will never again see my wife Helen, or my son Erland; I will forsake my castle and possessions, and pass my life as a penitent in this forest. To you this will give no consolation; but it will comfort *me*, for every moment shows me my unhappiness. The more I look at you, the more light dawns on my mind, the more my recollections become distinct, the more I am assured that you . . . O God! . . . that you . . . yes, I recognise you, Singoalla . . . you, the dream of my youth . . . my first love . . . my wife!"

Hitherto immovable like a statue, Singoalla now bent lower over her son's corpse, and the Knight heard her weeping. Then he went up to her, lifted her up, and pressed her to his bosom. His chest heaved, his eyes grew moist with tears, through which beamed the glance of a brightened spirit.

Singoalla

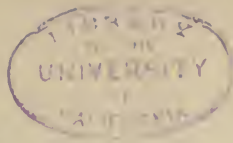
His embrace, however, was brief. A thought put an end to it ; the Knight turned away, and with his hand pressed to his forehead he went out of the cave ; and Assim, who followed him through the pile of rocks, saw him slowly disappear in the forest.



The Plague.



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VIII.

THE PLAGUE.

THE day came with heavy air and overcast sky. Only now and then did the sun penetrate the clouds, and then only with a strange, dull, yellow light. The wind had fallen, but the calm which ensued brought along with it— notwithstanding the cloudy sky—sultriness only.

Early in the morning the monks were aroused from their sleep by a violent ringing. John, the lay-brother, opened the door, and saw a man dressed in tawdry, ragged garb. He asked leave to speak to the monks. Soon some of them appeared with the Prior at their head. With a hurried glance Father Henry examined the man's face, and exclaimed, "What do you wish? You belong to the godless people who ten years ago plundered this monastery, or my eyes deceive me."

But the man replied, "You have had time to forget that! I come now to ask you for help, if

Singoalla

you have any help to give. We arrived here last night, and have encamped in the forest. The Plague is raging amongst us!"

"The Plague?" repeated the Prior with stiffening tongue.

"Yes, the Black Death!" said the man.

"The Black Death!" repeated the monks, some of them reeling against the pillars of the archway, others throwing themselves on their faces to the floor, and others bowing their pallid faces on their breasts, and muttering "*Miserere, Domine!*"

Father Henry was the first to recover himself. He said to the man, "We will all follow you."

"Up!" he continued, addressing the monks. "The reaper is come. It is our duty to save the wheat while the tares are pulled up and burned in eternal fire. Up and prepare yourselves for a solemn procession! Take the cross, the Host, a basin for baptism, and the Holy Relics with you! Come!"

The monks arose trembling. A quarter of an hour afterwards the procession marched out of the monastery. The stranger led the way. The lonely wanderers who met it threw themselves on the

The Plague

ground. Some among them knew already of the arrival of the ghastly visitor ; others, however, who had arrived from their lonely homes in the wilderness, and who had not seen a human face that morning, were ignorant of it. The monks, advancing with cross and banners, Host and reliquary, sang, but the soft strains of the hymn were lost in the heavy air as if the forest's echo had died away :

*“Aufer immensam, Deus, aufer iram,
Et cruentatum cohibe flagellum:
Nec scelus nostrum properes ad aquam
Pendere lancem.*

*Non opus summi pereat magistri
Nec sinas passam fore passionem,
Corde sed manans lavet omne crimen
Sanguis et unda.”¹*

A crowd followed the procession as, guided by the stranger, it marched to the clearing where the

¹ Turn aside, O Lord, Thy boundless wrath, and hold Thy destructive scourge. Weigh not our offences in the balance of Thy inexorable justice.

Let not the Supreme Master's work perish. Let not Thy passion be in vain. Wash all our offences in the blood and water that flows from Thy Heart.

Singoalla

strange people were now encamped, as they were ten years ago.

And here they saw the dead, the sick and dying. Here was seen mute despair, terror of death, grief and helplessness. Some of the strange people uttered wildly: "Alako, Alako!" Others hurried with cups to and from a neighbouring spring to cool the sick with its water.

The cries of suffering ceased as the procession neared the edge of the forest, and the melancholy tones of the Plague-hymn chimed over the clearing. Wrapped round by the thin smoke of incense, the procession passed slowly round the field. But through the crowd, which curiosity had gathered, there spread the one whispered word "Plague," which scattered the people like chaff before the wind!

Father Henry seized the cross, walked between the dead and living, and planted the sacred symbol in the midst of the field of sorrow. Then the monks scattered over the clearing to save souls from heathenry, and relieve the suffering. The sick and the whole alike bowed before the bowl of baptism, and thus were cleansed to gain grace from God and the Christ. Many of the sick, after bap-

The Plague

tism, were anointed with the holy oil ere they died. Parched palates were refreshed with wine and water, despairing minds with words of consolation. The strangers who were untouched by the Plague were exhorted to take their spades and dig a grave for the dead. This they did, and a monk said mass hourly in an even, trembling, unwearied voice, on the brink of this grave which claimed more and more victims.

While the monks were thus engaged, the news of the great manslayer spread over the whole neighbourhood. All hearts trembled. Many a one set his wits to turn the evil from himself and his dear ones. Some fled with wife and children to the south of the forests; the dwellers in lonely forest farms brought out their bows and arrows against any one who dared to approach their homes.

But the grisly guest could not be scared by bows and arrows. In the course of the few weeks past suspected deaths had occurred here and there in the neighbourhood, but no one believed, or was willing to believe, that it was the work of the destroyer. Now that none could doubt his presence, the last barriers to his lust for slaying seemed

Singoalla

utterly broken down. The night after the arrival of the strange people, the destroying angel flew from door to door, and no holy sign on the door-post could bar his entrance.

“No, their water and wine, and oil, and song, and incense are of no avail. We must die. Let us then live while we may. We are wanderers and fearless. Let us feast and be merry even on the brink of the grave.”

Thus spoke the men of the strange people, and took their arms and went off to the castle of Ekö, the cellars of which they believed were well stored with beer and wine. When they came to the sound, they found the drawbridge up, and in the castle-yard men who had tied cloths round their faces so that hardly more than their eyes were visible. They walked apart, as if they feared to come too near one another.

“Halloo! Down with the bridge!” shouted the strangers.

The few men in the castle-yard answered this exhortation with threatening gestures, then with a shower of stones and arrows. But the strangers,

The Plague

undeterred by this, waded across the sound, and the people of the castle fled in boats across the lake. Then there was a merry time in the castle of Ekö: revel and song till night, when the troop marched off, lit up by the flames of the towers and battlements they had set alight.

But Lady Helen, with her son and servants, in the forenoon of this the last day of the castle, had already taken refuge in the monastery, in the hope of finding, within the walls of the sanctuary and in the company of the men of God, calm for their trembling souls. No one knew where Erland and the little pilgrim were.

Seven days had passed when at midnight the door-bell of the monastery rang. After a while steps were heard in a corridor, and a voice asked, "Who is there?"

"Brother janitor! friend John! I know your voice. Open to Erland Bengtson Monesköld!"

"What!" cried the brother, "are you still alive, Sir Knight? Or are my ears playing me a trick?"

The door was opened, and the lay-brother's

Singoalla

pale, thin face, staring and amazed, appeared by the light of the lamp he held in his hand.

“Brother John,” said the Knight, “be not afraid! I am no phantom but a living man, strange as it may seem to us both. Wheresoever I have turned my eyes, the field is so well mown that hardly a straw stands upright.”

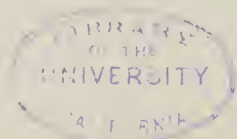
“All is changed since I saw you last, Sir Knight. If you please to enter this abode of death, you will be the only one under this roof living, except myself.”

“No,” replied the Knight, “I have made a vow never again to enter a dwelling built by human hands; and, moreover, death dwells without as well as within. The world is a graveyard, and you seem to me, Brother John, as one who has been buried in it alive. Such another I seem myself, for my heart is surely buried and cannot feel sorrow again.”

“’Tis well, for otherwise your bosom could not hold your grief. Know you that your wife is dead, that all your most faithful servants are dead, and that your father and teacher, Father Henry, is no more with us? Have you seen the burnt remnants



The Knight and the Monk.



The Plague

of your castle, Sir Knight? All is vanity, all, all!"

"Set down your lamp and follow me," said the Knight. "It is nothing new to me that all that is dear to me is lost."

"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" sighed the monk, as he set out to walk by the Knight's side. "It is only a few hours ago that I buried my beloved Prior, and most wondrous! . . . my eyes have shed no tears for his memory. It is with me as with you: I have buried my heart in the grave of my brethren."

"Which died first, my wife or my son?" asked the Knight, and his voice faltered a little.

"Your son still lives . . . have I not told you? . . . unless he has died since I laid him in the arms of the Comforter. God sent me an angel in the guise of a woman, who sat giving comfort to your wife as she died. Who she was I know not. She had never been seen in this neighbourhood before. She spoke beautiful words to the dying Lady Helen, and often spoke your name to cheer her."

Singoalla

“Then I know who this woman was,” said the Knight; “and it was in her arms you laid my son?”

“Yes, what else could I do?”

“Has she gone away?”

“Yes; she followed the strange people—or rather, the strange people followed her. It was a wonderful sight. When she first showed herself to them, the despairing gave her hearty greeting, those who raved grew calm, and the Plague fled from the clearing. She is a being of a higher nature, and your son reposes well in her arms.”

The two men wandered together for a while in silence. The Knight somehow felt strangely at ease, as he had now nothing to lose, nothing to hope for. He felt himself at last standing free against his fate. He had lost all, but he did not murmur. What folly to lay claim, among change, decay, and death, to enjoy unbroken happiness in this life! Who plays a part in the chequered scene of life's passions perhaps may realise the meaning of what he plays, but the cloud which floats in the rosy golden morn has little share in thoughts of eternity. The sparkle of sun-lit water, the heave

The Plague

and fall of the wave, the whisper in the oak's crest, why ask of them an eternity that is not in them? Can you so fix them that they will defy decay? Then why seek to do so for castle and tower, riches and honour, or the happiness of home life, or aught of what unthinking man grasps at, and for which, when lost, he sheds useless tears? He who has once set his foot on the rock of eternity would not fear even the wreck of the Universe with all its stars, or if the heavens and the earth were shivered to atoms. It is only a sunbeam that has died away, a billow that has sunk, a murmur that is still. The Knight looked up at the stars and felt that whatsoever fate was written in them for him, he would never again be frightened or glad. He was free— free from all the pomps and vanities, and changes and chances of this mortal life; free from all that can be measured by time. But behind all this there loomed in his soul a glimpse of something which never faded. What the vanished images of Helen, little Erland, Benoni, and Singoalla signified, what their coming and going meant, was something beyond the reach of death, though perhaps in death he might find the answer.

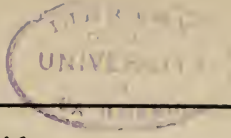
Singoalla

A ghastly picture was the night in the forest when the moonlight quivered on the blood-stained blade, but even that image did not terrify him now. He owned that crime must be atoned for, and he was ready and willing, as far as guilt rested upon him, to let unswerving vengeance claim its due. He had no scales to weigh his share in the dark fortune of his life, and if he had had them he would have thrown them away without using them, for he felt no desire to bargain, and haggle, and make terms with his crime and its retribution. Then he thought of another symbol—that of atonement, and listened with devotion as Brother John, who walked by his side, broke the silence, and in a low voice sang a verse of the Plague-hymn:

*“Da crucem, clavos, scuticam, coronam,
Lanceam, funes rigidamque mortem
Inter iratam mediare dextram
Et mala nostra.”¹*

Erland Monesköld and Brother John wandered all night in the forest. When the morning sun

¹ Grant, O Lord, that Thy Cross, nails, crown of thorns, lance, the ropes that bound Thee, and Thy Body stiff in death may stand between Thy right hand raised in wrath and our iniquities.



The Plague

rose over a landscape, the calm of which was cheered by no song of bird, tinkling cow-bell, nor herdsman's horn—because the Black Death had just abandoned it and left silence in its wake—the two men were standing on the hill by the forest brook, and Brother John said:

“And so, Brother Erland, it is on this hill that we must dig our hermitage.”

“Yes,” said Erland, “here we will make our abode.” He cast a glance down on the grassy turf at the foot of the hill, where, by the border of the brook, a few of the last flowers of autumn were still lingering. Thence his glance wandered into the forest, whence in former days the beloved of his soul used to come to meet him.

“Shall we make our habitation on the east side?” asked John. “We shall then be awakened by the dawn, and can greet the rising sun with a morning hymn.”

“No, brother,” said Erland; “unless you desire the east side, let us choose this one to the west, towards the brook where we can bid the evening sun, symbol of the setting sun of our own lives, farewell with the hymn of the hope of resurrection.”

Singoalla

“Well, then, we will choose the west side. . . .”

“If you do not desire the other. . . .”

“No, no, good brother,” said John, looking with a gentle glance at the whilom knight’s face, once so stern and commanding, now so gentle and submissive. “Let us return to the monastery and fetch our spades! And then to our work!”

IX.

THE HERMITS OF THE FOREST.

IT was a fine summer's evening. The horizon in the west was tinged with gold and purple. The rain which had fallen at midday had refreshed the fields; the spruce-trees and meadows exhaled perfume, and people breathed the pure air with delight.

Far in the forest the settler's axe was heard, and there work went on briskly; for the fields, which for twenty-five years—ever since the time of the Plague—had lain untilled, were now ripe for the ploughshare.

At the entrance of his cave sat one of the hermits of the neighbourhood, Erland, the man of God, who was deeply revered by the people. An hour ago he left the garden, where almost all day long he had been busy with hoe and spade. He now sat on his mossy couch, gazing with dreaming eyes at the sunset glow, which shone from his calm

Singoalla

face. In his hand he held a book, the reflections of a mystic, his favourite book, fetched several years ago from the vault of the abandoned monastery.

Brother John, the other hermit, had just returned from fishing in the lake, and was now preparing supper.

John, who seldom broke the silence so dear to Erland, was this night talkative beyond his wont. He had on his way from the lake seen something strange in the forest, and could not help telling it.

He had seen men of unknown aspect, noble and proud in their manners, and attired in splendid armour, resting with their horses in the forest. They had, no doubt, journeyed from afar, and had asked him in the Latin tongue the best road for horsemen northwards to Lake Wetter. Who they were and what their errand was he did not know.

Erland listened kindly, not because such an event was really uncommon, or perhaps worth thinking of, but because John evidently took pleasure in talking of it, and seemed to make some claim to curiosity on his friend's part.

Who these men were and what their errand was,



Brother John.

The Hermits of the Forest

John, as we said before, did not know, and the tale itself can only be hinted at, for darkness broods over so much of the past. The secret writings which, under seven seals, in the archives of a Brotherhood, prove the descent of this brotherhood from one older and now dissolved, would, if opened to profane eyes, reveal much about a pilgrimage which the Knights of the Vanished Temple and the Searchers for the Burning Pyre made to the North, to find there, if possible, the beginnings of an old-world worship, of which they had gathered portions from the pagodas of India, the pyramids of Egypt, the underground caves of Delphi and Eleusis, what remained of Solomon's Temple, and the cromlechs of the Druids, and to blend them all in a halo of glory round the Cross. They might tell, these chronicles, that one of these pilgrims was the young son of an Indian priestess, an initiated Knight of the Vanished Temple, skilled in the wisdom of East and West, and owner of great treasure. Beyond this the legend says no more.

While Brother Erland was still reposing at the entrance of the cave, and looking dreamily at the fading sunset glow, one of the strangers—a sturdy

Singoalla

youth of brown complexion, but fair hair—was seen to approach from the other side of the brook. He stopped, looked about him with glances of seeming recognition, though surely he had never been on this spot before, then crossed the water to the hermit, and sat down on the mossy seat by his side.

John, who stood some distance off, beheld this with amazement, and his wonder increased when Erland and the youth conversed together, and Erland's countenance, as they talked, assumed an expression of eager attention. John's wonder reached its height when at last he saw the youth, after a long embrace, part from Erland, with tears, and return to the forest.

John was loath to ask the meaning of what he saw, lest his questioning might seem over-curious, and ill-befitting a hermit's life. But he expected that Erland himself would some day speak of the matter.

Erland, however, never said anything concerning it. On the following morning, when John went fishing in the lake, Brother Erland accompanied him.



After a Long Embrace.



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The Hermits of the Forest

John pushed off his boat and got ready his tackle. While doing so, he sang softly a song about Simon Peter the fisherman. Erland, who sat on the shore in the shade of a lime-tree, soon was deep again in his favourite book—*On Rest in God*.



THE END.





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